Minga

Toolkit for artisan
communities in crisis

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Supporting Colombian artisan communities

A toolkit to help them find their common direction.

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Abstract

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The artisan sector comes from ancient communities that made objects to solve material and spiritual needs. Their techniques were transmitted until artisans today, who have mastered them for the creation of products that go beyond domestic needs. Currently, artisan communities try to live from the revenues of these products, but are facing many difficulties that could stop the preservation and transmission of their knowledge to future generations. The project had as motivation a previous personal experience, in Curiti, Santander, Colombia, which was later enriched with primary and secondary research from Italy and Colombia. The exploration showed as main result the concerns artisans are facing, which were clustered into internal and external issues. Minga is a set of tools proposed as a solution for Colombian artisan communities in crisis, it means communities facing internal issues related with identity, purpose, trust, and rules. By now, the toolkit had a first validation session with members of the Muisca artisan community, however, future applications will have to done, to improve the use of it by different individuals. Even though the toolkit still has a long way to go, the project was useful to understand different things. First, to learn about the current situation of artisans in Colombia and Italy. Second, to analyse that the work currently done between artisans and designers is not fulfilling the expectations from both sides, since it is focused on products and sales, instead on preserving techniques and supporting healthy communities. Hopefully, changing the role of the designer when interacting with artisans, would be the main legacy of this toolkit for the future.

Abstract

italian

Il settore artigianale nasce dalle antiche comunità che realizzavano oggetti per risolvere bisogni materiali e spirituali. Le loro tecniche sono state trasmesse fino ad oggi agli artigiani, che le hanno padroneggiate per la creazione di prodotti che vanno oltre le esigenze domestiche. Attualmente, le comunità artigiane cercano di vivere dei ricavi di questi prodotti, ma stanno affrontando molte difficoltà che potrebbero impedire la conservazione e la trasmissione del loro sapere alle generazioni future. Il progetto ha avuto come motivazione una precedente esperienza personale, a Curiti, Santander, Colombia, che si è poi arricchita di ricerche primarie e secondarie dalla Colombia e dall'Italia. L'esplorazione ha mostrato come risultato principale le preoccupazioni che gli artigiani stanno affrontando, e che sono state raggruppate in questioni interne ed esterne. Minga è un insieme di strumenti proposti come soluzione per comunità artigiane colombiane in crisi, questo vuol dire comunità che affrontano problemi al loro interno legati all'identità, al loro scopo, alla fiducia e alle regole. Finora, il toolkit ha avuto una prima sessione di convalida con i membri della comunità artigiana di Muisca, tuttavia, future applicazioni dovranno essere fatte, per migliorarne l'utilizzo da parte di individui diversi. Anche se il toolkit ha ancora molta strada da fare, il progetto è stato utile per capire tante cose. In primo luogo, per conoscere la situazione attuale degli artigiani in Colombia e in Italia. In secondo luogo, analizzare che il lavoro attualmente svolto tra artigiani e designer non soddisfa le aspettative di entrambe le parti, poiché si concentra sui prodotti e sulle vendite, invece che sulla conservazione delle tecniche e sul sostegno di comunità sane. Si spera che cambiare il ruolo del designer quando interagisce con gli artigiani possa essere l'influenza principale di questo toolkit per il futuro.

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Motivation to write the thesis
Double diamond
What is a community
Why and how people join
Strategic design and community centered design

Motivation to write the thesis

The motivation to work with artisan communities came from a working experience I had before coming to Italy. In 2017 I had the opportunity to work with a company called Artesanías de Colombia, a governmental company which main goal is to support Colombian artisans and improve their quality of life by empowering them through consultancy and workshops about production, innovation, business etc. I was working as lead designer in Santander, a municipality from Colombia with one of the most important artisan towns in the country, Curiti. This town is recognized for its products in fique, and most of its habitants work in the process of making fique and fique by-products. There are around 6 big workshops of artisans in the town that have most of the clients and hire individual artisans as cheap workforce.

By 2018 these companies had conformed an association looking for mutual benefits and the creation of a common brand, but distrust and fights between them were frequent, just like cases of workshops stealing clients and designs from the others. This situation made me reflect on how much this town could do in terms of reinforcing their identity and showing it to more people, if they could only join and tackle issues together.

The concept of artisanal communities is widely used for different groups working with handcrafts, however, from the research, I found that many of these communities do not feel comfortable while being together. Plenty of them are facing a hidden crisis, they show themselves as a strong group, but inside they are split and competing against each other.

This thesis aims to provide tools for artisans to face the main difficulties they find in their journey to bond together, and to create a strong community that helps them to keep their traditions and identity alive.

FIG 1 *Artisan from Santander* (Becerra, 2018)

Why working with artisan communities in Colombia?

My work with Artesanias de Colombia

As I mentioned already, during 2017 I had the experience to work with a community of artisans located in Curiti, Santander, Colombia for the first time. I had graduated from Industrial design's bachelor two years before and my main experience was related with product design. When I signed the contract with Artesanias de Colombia I was told that my main task would be the involvement in the community, so that we could create with them a new collection of products that would connect their technical and traditional knowledge with the contemporary design trends. The goal was to improve the artisans' life through the increase of their sales and the support on marketing, business, and exhibition topics. After one month of working with the community I learned that the main difficulties were not related with getting the artisans to open themselves and work with me, but were related with the fact that they were not able to connect with the other artisans in the community, and there were a lot of trust issues between them.

I had the opportunity to keep working with the community in Curiti for almost a year before coming to Italy. They are one of the biggest artisan communities in Colombia, and for this reason Artesanias de Colombia was extremely supportive through the creation of their association and common brand. However, the conflicts inside the community made it difficult for these projects to keep going, since each person and workshop had their own interest, which prevailed over the ones of the others. Big opportunities with important clients, who expected the design and supply of products, were lost because of competition and fights. After talking with many artisans, the answers were always the same "It is difficult to work with this people", "I'm thinking about stop doing this activity, because of the people in the town", "I don't feel welcome to be part of the association, and they don't know what they are doing".

FIG 14 *Workshop in Curiti* (Becerra, 2018)

Constant comments and situations like the ones before made me doubt if it was an issue of this specific community, or something wider, which might involve the whole community of artisans in Colombia and even in the world. After this project I have learned interesting lessons about how the context can be different and can help to develop different artisan techniques and processes, but at the end artisans around the world are facing similar issues and constraints.

I present the community from Curití as my starting point and main case study, since it was the one which gave me the inspiration for the project. The artisans from this town have a great potential to be globally renown, but the issues they face could be found in artisan communities all around the world. Even though each problem should be tackled in their individuality, there are some tools that might help these communities to start taking the right direction.

The process

1. **Community research**
Definitions, typologies, history

2. **First segmentation**
Artisan communities

3. **Second segmentation**
Colombian artisan communities

4. **External and internal issues**
Case studies, interviews

5. **Issues definition**
Focus on internal issues

6. **Design question**
Define main issues to tackle

7. **Toolkit first draft**
Existing tools and techniques

8. **Online toolkit validation**
Sharing with artisan community

9. **On-site application**
To be done

The process to create the toolkit started with a deep **research phase**. This stage was characterized at the beginning by lack of clarity about what to focus the effort on, and on trying to understand which kind of communities to work with. There was a clear interest on communities, however, it was difficult to understand how to support communities if there was not a defined issue and context. During this stage, the investigation was focused on the definition of communities, how are built, what kind of communities exist and how its definition have changed through history.

It was only after understanding the evolution of communities, that the question of why supporting communities became important. What if communities were not necessary anymore? Why supporting an offline community if the future is moving to the online arena? And **what kind of communities** to support and how? This was a challenging moment that made me realize about my previous knowledge and the experience I had with communities, with artisan communities, and how important it was to preserve their knowledge and traditions nowadays and for future times.

Deeper research was done again, now focused on these specific communities, both from Colombia and Italy. It was interesting to find so many historical differences between the two countries, and how this has changed the current perception customers have of the products from both countries. Even though there are similar issues, the main differences of context, and my previous experience in Colombia, made me more prone to work with them for the toolkit development. I went deep into interviews with artisans from three different communities in Colombia, into articles and case studies of what has done design for the sector, until I arrived to two clusters of problems (internal and external problems), and finally, to the **design question**.

After the problems were defined, it was time to start designing. An **analysis of existing tools** was done, some of them were combined with the interview's insights, and many tools were rejected before the final ones. At the end we had a process of 4 phases and 13 tools, that aim to support artisan communities from Colombia in their internal issues. Then came the **validation session**, with members of the Muisca community, which will hopefully have the opportunity to apply the physical tools in the future. From this session there were interesting **conclusions to improve the toolkit and about the influence and the new approaches design can have on these communities**.

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What is a community?

The different meanings society has given to the word community have changed over time according to the period and social circumstances. The word comes originally from Latin *communitas*, which transformed into Old French *comunete*, to late Middle English, *community* (Oxford, 2020). It can refer to a joint ownership, an association, but also a nation, and any group of people living in the same space.
Especially now, different meanings can be found when talking about communities, ranging from geographic distinctions to online groups of interest.

From the **Oxford dictionary**'s definitions (Oxford, 2020), the ones that could be more interesting for our final scope could be:

" A group of people who share the same interests, pursuits, or occupation, esp. when distinct from those of the society in which they live.

The fact of having a quality or qualities in common; shared character, similarity; identity; unity.

Social cohesion; mutual support and affinity such as is derived from living in a community.

Steven Brint (Brint, 2001) was able to summarize in a clear way the definition of community, as:

" Aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern.

Technology has played an important role in this field, since it has allowed people with similar interests, who do not share the same space, to meet and join. This is in fact, one of the major disruptions in the history of communities. Most people see ancient communities as a symbol and an aspiration, a

pacific village where people would enjoy a life of simplicity and sharing, somewhere where society should return. Indeed, one of the first attempts of community classification was made by Toennies ([1887]1957), who tried to understand the differences lying under the village and urban ways of life, however, it wasn't helpful from a scientific point of view, showing mostly a romantic and nostalgic preference for past communities, against the urban ones (Douglas, 2016). It is important to understand, nonetheless, that most communities in the past didn't live in this utopic world we usually imagine.

After Toennies, Durkheim's contribution appeared as a more objective and scientific approach to a typology of community. He defined a set of variables that could characterize communities, but that are not necessarily a part of them.

The structural variables he proposed, (of which two are cultural variables) are the following:
1. Dense and demanding social ties
2. Social attachments to and involvements in institutions
3. Ritual occasions
4. Small group size

Cultural variables:
5. Perceptions of similarity with the physical characteristics, expressive style, way of life, or historical experience of others.
6. Common beliefs in an idea system, a moral order, an institution, or a group (Brint, 2001).

Steven Brint localizes these variables in environments that show similar patterns of behavior and social interaction. These environments help to define and to locate most of the communities that exist nowadays. The tables in the next pages show how the typology divides into different subgroups starting from two branches, which are *geography* and *choice*.

Community Types

by Steven Brint

Existential basis of relationship ties

Choice

Primary reason for interaction

Activity-Based

Belief-Based

Location of other members

Concentrated in space

Concentrated in space

Elective communities (Activity-Based)

Elective communities (Subcultural-ideological)

Dispersed in space

Dispersed in space

Amount of face-to-face interaction

Some

Some

Dispersed friendship networks (primarly activity-based)

Dispersed friendship networks (primarly cultural)

None

None

Virtual communities

"Imagined communities"

FIG 2 *Community Types.* (Brint, 2001)

```
                              ┌─────────────────┐
                              │    Geography    │
                              └─────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
          ┌─────────────────┐                  ┌─────────────────┐
          │  Activity-Based │                  │   Belief-Based  │
          └─────────────────┘                  └─────────────────┘

          ┌─────────────────┐                  ┌─────────────────┐
          │ Relatively      │                  │ Relatively      │
          │ frequent        │                  │ frequent        │
          │ interaction     │                  │ interaction     │
          └─────────────────┘                  └─────────────────┘

        *Small-scale communities              *Communes/collectives*
        of place, neighborhood group*

          ┌─────────────────┐                  ┌─────────────────┐
          │ Relatively      │                  │ Relatively      │
          │ infrequent      │                  │ infrequent      │
          │ interaction     │                  │ interaction     │
          └─────────────────┘                  └─────────────────┘

        *Local friendship networks            *Local friendship networks
        (primarly activity-based)*            (primarly cultural)*
```
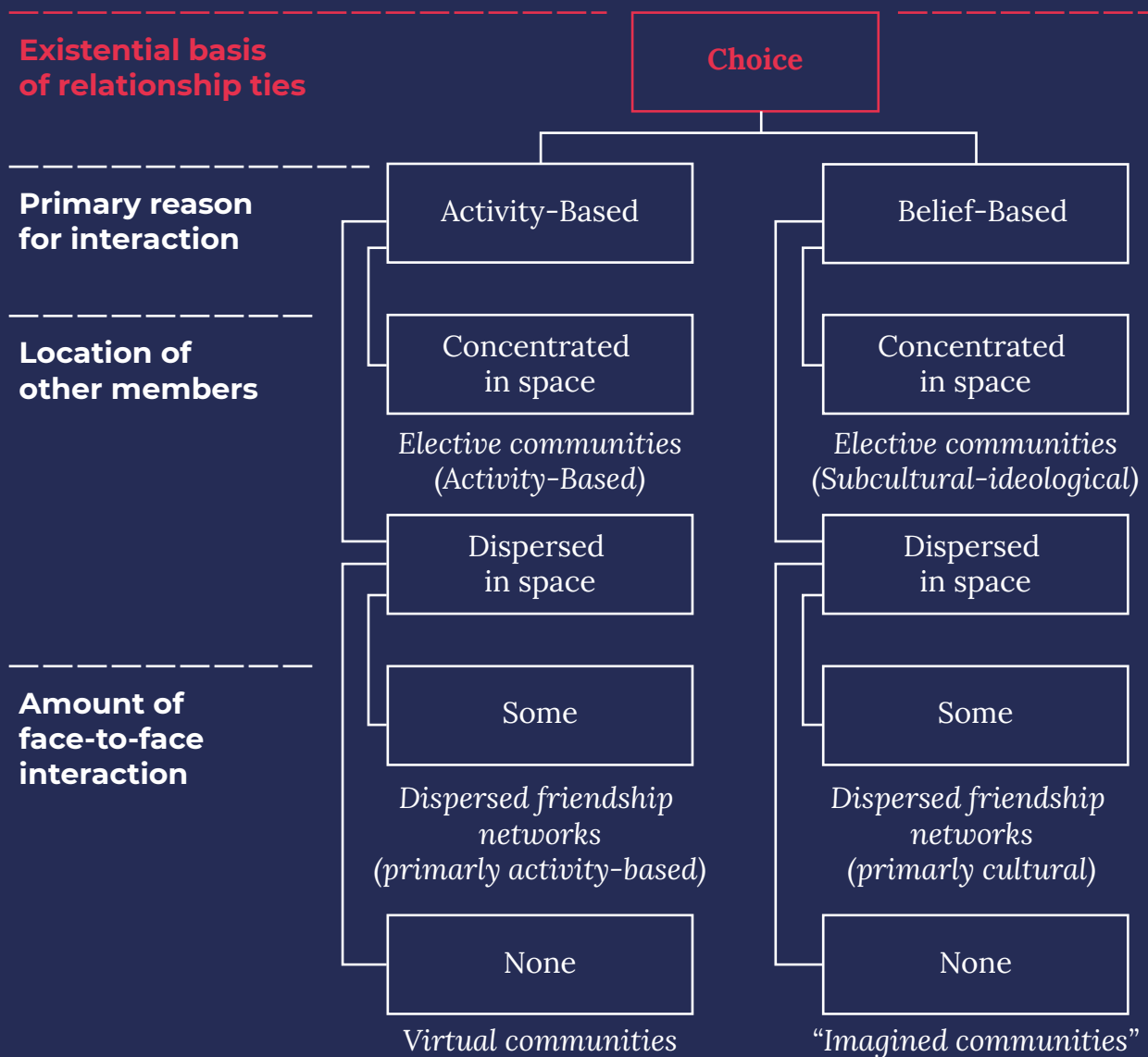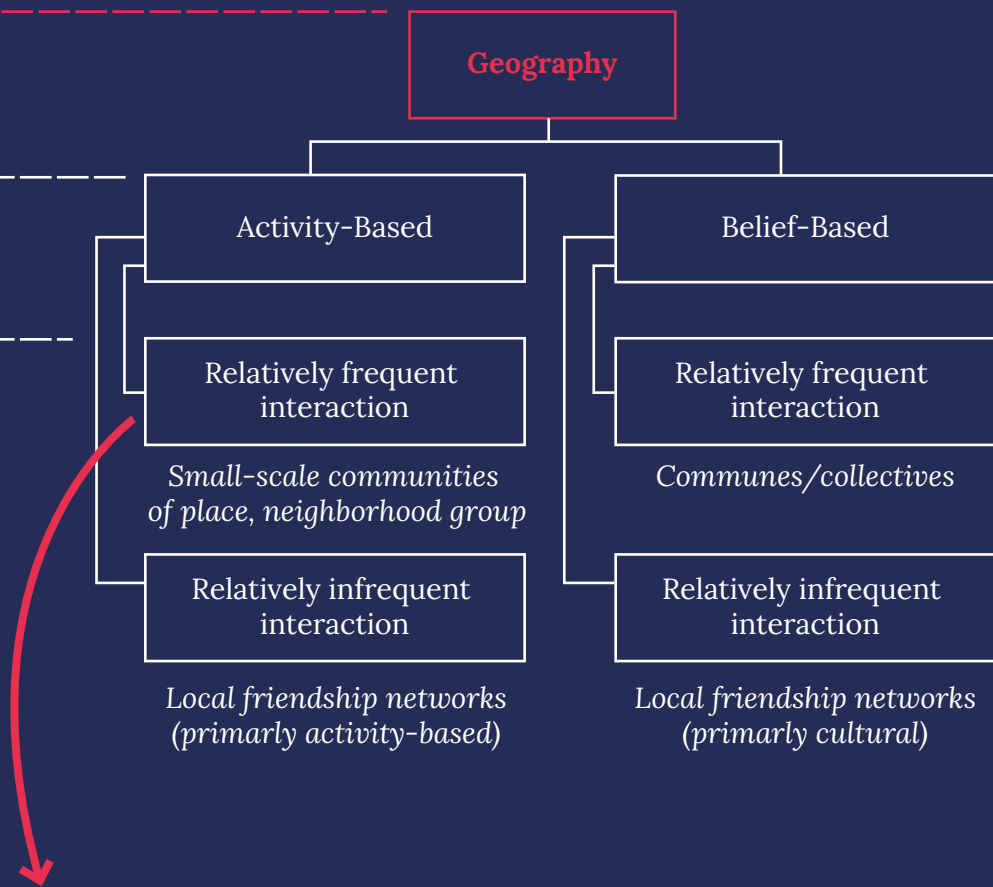
Artisan communities in Colombia

Local communities had a decline, when people started to relate more with individuals in different locations than with the ones from their same geographic position. Looking at communities from the past as an utopic aspiration is a mistake that denies the evolution communities have had through the years, because these changes in the way people join nowadays and how they interact, come from their adaptation to crisis and transformations in the social and digital areas. Communities are no more stable and self-enclosed as before but are starting to be seen as transient social networks, most of them temporary and not related at all.

However, by 2020, with the pandemic of COVID-19 that hit the world, most of the activities were moved to online spaces, and also communities had to face this transition. New questions are arising in this era, and one of the most important ones is: are we losing some crucial physical connections by moving our whole interactions to the digital arena? Aren't we sacrificing relationships with people close to us (our family, neighbors...), because of the same technology that is uniting us with people from across the world? (Harari, 2019). We might be losing important links with our body, and with people physically near to us. Understanding this and preserving offline interactions and communities is a must for our future as sensitive beings.

This is one of the reasons behind helping artisan communities that, according to Brint's previous table, could be placed in the section of:

Geographic ⟶ Activity-based ⟶ Relatively frequent interaction

These groups are facing the crisis that comes from trying to be closed and stable over the years, while being part of a world that is going through many social and digital transformations. The specific situation these communities are tackling will be explained in detail in the next chapters.

Why and how people join?

But why is important to join? For many years, social sciences were dominated by the trust in the individual self-interest to promote the common good. In fact, Hardin's *"Tragedy of the Commons" theory* explains how in a group of people where resources are shared, individuals will work independently for their own benefit, rather than joining for the common good. Hardin used this concept referring to any unregulated spaces to which communities had access (oceans, rivers, forest, etc) (Sloan, Ostrom, & Cox, 2013).

Even though is easy to believe that this behavior is part of our human nature, there is a concept in biology that gives us some hope, and describes how homo sapiens have overcome this tragedy through the *major evolutionary transition*, "We are distinctive among primates in our degree of cooperation among nonrelatives, in our capacity for symbolic thought, and in our capacity to transmit learned information across generations" (Sloan et al., 2013). It means that, as *Elinor Ostrom* says, "groups are capable of avoiding the tragedy of the commons without requiring top-down regulation, at least if certain conditions are met". In fact, she summarized into *eight core principles*, the main conditions a group should have in order to succeed:

1. Having clearly defined boundaries (limits of the shared resources)

2. Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs (contributions and rewards)

3. Collective-choice arrangements (making rules together)

4. Monitoring (by the members of the group)

5. Graduated sanctions

6. Conflict resolution mechanisms

7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize (external rules will be hardly recognized)

8. For groups that are part of larger social systems, there must be appropriate coordination among relevant groups

The major evolutionary transition explains why humans have a natural disposition to cooperate and to join into groups, but that not all groups have the same characteristics of context, and not all humans have the same levels of altruism and selfishness. (Sloan et al., 2013). This distinction between different kind of groups and individuals is clear from the recurrent contrast in politics and economics between individuals working for their own profits, and groups of people traying to cooperate for the group welfare.

Especially in the last years, with the birth of the "sharing economy", more people are showing their concern about the use we give to products and spaces, and how we can provide solutions that are more sustainable. However, even if can be an answer for the environmental needs, these new services are also revealing the contrast between companies working for the common benefit (e.g. open source platforms like Wikipedia) and companies monetizing themselves from the sharing concept and from the work of "users" who end up working without any regulation or insurance (e.g. Uber – Airbnb) (Scholz, 2014).

One solution for groups willing to work for the common benefit are cooperatives, unfortunately, these organizations are always fighting to get more funding, to find volunteers, and to have minimum resources to survive. Just few of them have been successful, and for this reason new ways of collaboration are emerging to shift that situation. Examples of that are Platform Cooperativism (Sandoval, 2019) and Open Cooperativism (Pazaitis, Kostakis, & Bauwens, 2017), movements that address issues of cooperatives' rights and the creation of a new economy which has the commons at its center.
Even though these new models are not so strong and recognized, the important thing is that the there is still interest in the commons, and that people are looking for ways to face the current economic model, so that it benefits a bigger group of people.

Finally, the world is facing a situation never lived before, and that is changing completely the way in which we meet, communicate, and interact. COVID-19 has transformed our previous reality, placing us in an environment of fear, distrust, and isolation. Of course, this situation has increased the trend towards individualism, encouraging people to stay at home and to keep distance from others even during common activities. It has also repositioned the ax of our life, from physical spaces to digital ones, by moving most of our activities into this sphere. Most important, it has showed us how fragile our economic system is, and how inequal is the wealth distributed around the world. Nevertheless, the crisis has also revealed situations

in which for someone in need, there is always someone else willing to give from what they have (money, food, or time). We have felt support from our neighbors, from people in other countries and we are learning that working together is the only way to come out from this situation that hits all of us alike.

The outcome of this moment we are living, will be the birth of a new kind of communities, communities that will require new ways of interaction, communities that will face an economic crisis that will demand common goals and common answers. That is the only way in which we can overcome these times, by being together.

Strategic design and community- centered design

The term user-centered design was first introduced by Donald Norman in the 80's and became widely recognized in the design field after the publication of his books. According to Norman, product design should be always focused on the user needs, making sure they can easily learn how product is used. Norman's theory evolved in designers aiming to have complete understanding of the users needs and constrains. To accomplish it, he suggested them to start involving and working together with users, preferentially in their natural environment. (Abras, Maloney-krichmar, & Preece, 2004)

This user-focused approach was an important step to start thinking about the power people have in the product design process and in future solutions. However, solutions nowadays are not only imagined as products, but are every time more often conceived as services, most of them developed from the bottom, by the same users in need. According to Anna Meroni head of the Master of Science in Product Service System Design at Politecnico di Milano and coordinator of the POLIMI-DESIS Lab, this new approach towards intangible solutions that includes users in the design process, has led to the term of strategic design and product service system design. These two approaches, even if similar are not the same, and while strategic design always involves a PSS, not all PSS involve strategic design. The differentiating factor lies on the radical innovation strategic design entails, but that not all the PSS implies.

Strategic design can provide the values to guide a PSS towards social innovation, and to have an identity that makes it different from its competitors. Focusing on these issues has set the way to move from user-centered design to *community-centered design*, and approach in which solutions are thought not by and for individuals but are *based on social behaviors and needs*. Of course, having an holistic approach which considers the environmental aspect as well. *Also related with the major evolutionary transition, that we discussed before, strategic design solutions aim to be win-win*. This means that even if individuals have a selfish interest to win, they can find better advantages when they cooperate with other individuals and with the environment, in a solution in which they all can win. Implementing this approach is important not just to provide services that can be different from competitors, but also because according to evolutionary theory, and as Bateson defines it, "the minimum unit of survival in evolution is never simply an individual organism, not even a species, but always species plus-environment." (Meroni, 2008) Design has the task to create conversations with these active communities and with society, in order to develop together solutions with this future vision in mind.

FIG 3 *Artisan from Santander* (Becerra, 2018)

Artisan Communities

What are they?
How are in Colombia and in Italy?
What has done design for them?

What are artisan communities?

Artisanal products were defined by the UNESCO in 1997 as those *produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product*. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.

The artisan communities are embedded into a system formed by the connection of three aspects (FIG 4):

1. A productive processes or technology, that comes from their accumulated traditional knowledge

2. Cultural memory, that makes possible the development of specific artifacts

3. The management of natural resources.

To be economically sustainable, artisans must enter the global market dynamics, which boosts their innovation, but also their competitive ways (Pacheco, Gómez & Barrero, 2009). There are many issues regarding how much the quality of life of artisans actually improves when they have an increase on sales, and how positive it really is for them to get involved into capitalistic processes, when they have clear limits in their productive capacity. If we add to this the fact that there is a global industrial supremacy and that artisans are frequently excluded from local development plans, is clear why it has been so difficult for artisan communities to become strong independent bodies.
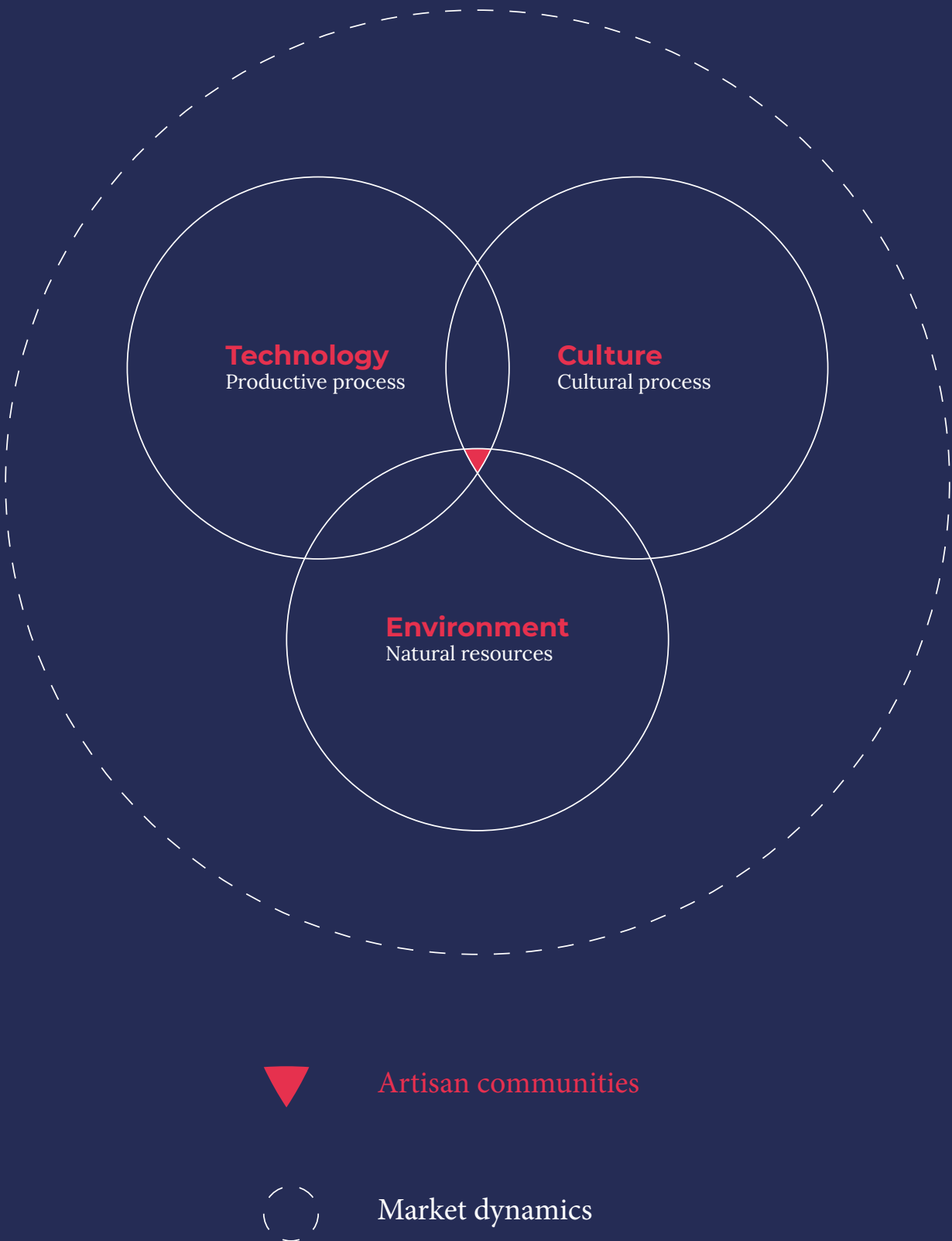
Technology
Productive process

Culture
Cultural process

Environment
Natural resources

Artisan communities

Market dynamics

FIG 4 *Artisan communities system*

In the paper "El desafío de las comunidades artesanales rurales: una propuesta ecotecnológica para una artesanía sostenible", the authors (Pacheco, et al. 2009) explained a study done with an artisan community from Galapa, Colombia. It was clear that artisans lacked an entrepreneurial mentality and did not receive any support or recognition from the local government and the state, leading to almost losing their cultural identity. The fact that artisans are not considered by the government and the institutions obliges them to provide answers by themselves to social, economic, and environmental crisis. Even though artisans have shown great adaptative skills, the fact that these answers are not organized and are focused only on the capitalist market, pose a risk for their cultural and environmental facets.

Is also important to see what happens when an artisan community does not have a clear identity it can feel proud of. First, let us understand who are the important actors in the productive organization of an artisan community: *masters, apprentices and workers*. While masters are focused on keeping the technique alive, on trying to teach it to new generations and to increase the productive capacity of the workshop, the apprentices join initially because of the income they can get from the work, and then they start feeling the interest for the cultural preservation of the technique. Finally, the workers are the ones who only join thinking about the income but are not interested in the cultural process.

Artisans usually do not have big technical knowledge related to environmental services in their area, but their knowledge is rather empirical, related to the natural resources and the best ways to manage them in order to make them last longer.

To summarize, artisan communities have a great responsability. They are based on their capacity to commercialize their products, to join and to be part of networks, to teach young people interested in working and in saving their cultural processes, are based on self-formation and on self-responsibility to assure the continuity of their artisan profession. (Pacheco et al., 2009)

"The various master craftsmen of our society help illustrate our heritage and legacy. Without them, we would not even have an identity. So, it is imperative that we save these skilled groups of people, strengthening the local economy in return and safeguard our cultural identity, especially during the prevalent crisis situation"

Maheen Khan
Founder President of Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh
(Chowdhury, 2020)

Artisan communities in Italy

The practice of artisans in Italy has a long history, with documents that come from 1000 AC, showing it was a strong pillar of the Italian economic development. According to these documents, each city had its own association of artisans, mostly of which were known and recognized around the world, and which were an important asset of politics as well. Artisans' profession was not free for everybody, but it requested people a registration into a corporation to perform the activity. This ensured that the production would answer to economic needs and social stability, but it also ensured the products would have certain levels of quality and quantity, while the corporation would regulate the use of resources, salaries, and work rights. As a benefit, the association would guarantee assistance and allowance for registered artisans (Tosi A., 2004).

This notoriety gave to *Made in Italy* products an identification of luxury and quality, and it is still a crucial characteristic of Italian handmade goods (Mortato, 2013). However, new times and technologies have strongly affected this economic sector, reducing the amount of people who are willing to work in the field and reducing the visibility of the ones who are struggling to survive.

Nowadays, the two most important requests from Italian artisans are to get closer to the younger generations, so they transmit their knowledge to this digital target (D'Agostino & Ferritti, 2016). From the other side, this generational gap has reduced the capacity of artisans to keep up to date with the last technologies, limiting their capacity to show their products in international online markets (Intoscana, 2013). Traditions that have been carried for years, are getting lost because of lack of visibility and adaptation to new realities.

To make it worst, in Italy the artisan and tourism fields are strictly related (Ricciardi, Bartollino, & Franceschini, 2008), and the COVID situation has strongly affected both, since tourism has decreased and most of the botteghe have been obliged to close for many months. Most of the artisans are desperate and asking help from the government (Finestre sull'Arte, 2020). It became clear how prestigious and luxury activities can have many contradictions inside (poor communities, low allowances, low salaries, and art expatriation).

Case studies

Artisan communities in Italy

Murano

The oldest documents of the existence of glass masters in Murano come from 982. As in other regions of Italy, this isle had one of the most important artisan traditions of the country, which was organized by associations that controlled the market and had important connections with the political power. Even though the region had some prosperous times, there have always been difficulties, because of privileges that some companies or families had and the lack of balance between the economic benefits of masters and apprentices. Until 1950 the sector had a big number of employees, approximately 4000, especially the Soc. Cristallerie Murano, which was a medium/big company with more than 1000 employees. Nevertheless, from 1961 the number of workers decreased notoriously, arriving to almost 2000 in the 90's. After 1971 there was also an important decrease of companies with more than 100 employees, with an increase of fragmented companies with less than 10 employees. Most of the production is meant to be exported, especially to USA, France, Germany, and Japan. Being an activity that requires mostly hand work and given the increase of imitations during the last years, the industry has a constant necessity to innovate its products in terms of design and functionality.

During the last years of 1900, to face the economic, occupational, and environmental crisis, some artisans tried to collaborate to defend the sector by creating an association, a brand, a consortium, and a school for glass apprentices. The idea is to keep active the exchange of knowledge from old to young generations and to promote the reskilling of the profession. This initiative has the support of the government and the chamber of commerce of Venice.

Even though these initiatives have good intentions for the sector, there are still some issues that have deteriorated the situation, such as the environmental requirements and the lack of interest from some companies to implement the changes. But also, the inability of some artisans to tackle together common problems (Tosi A., 2004).

FIG 5 *Murano glass* (Benklin)

Case studies

What has been done in Italy

InMurano

www.inmurano.com

InMurano is a non-profit association of young people who are interested in promoting the knowledge around Murano glass. They want the glass technique from Murano to be exhibited and recognized internationally, and to be safeguard by the national institutions, so its uniqueness can be seen and transmitted to new generations. Their main objectives are:

1. The creation of a network of artisans working with glass, so that Murano's image will be repositioned in the world.
2. Safeguarding the artistic and cultural heritage from the past through the creation of a video project that aims to create a "Library of Murano Glass".
3. Developing experiences for students to teach them about the process of developing Murano glass and the venetian reality.

The main workflow of the project has been focused on the development of a documentary, called *The engravers*, which shows the reality of two glass companies in Murano, one which had to close its doors and another one which renovated itself thanks to the integration between tradition and innovation. This film makes part of a project called Archivio InMurano, which anticipates the creation of audiovisual content and interviews with the reality in Murano.

Italian Stories

www.italianstories.it

Italian stories is a platform that allows people to meet with artisans around Italy and to have a memorable experience with them. The experiences are divided into:

1. Workshops, where people can learn about the technique and get in touch with the materials and process

2. Visits, where people follow a guided journey with the artisans to see their work and how they do it.

The platform has many different offers, from making wine and pasta, to working with clay and learning about luthiers. It aims to provide visibility to small artisans who might find it difficult to open themselves to new markets. Italian Stories chooses the best experiences, helps to promote them on their website and to manage a safe payment which arrives later to the artisans. The price's range goes from around 12-15 euros to 300 euros, depending on the experience, and each artisan is free to set the price they think is fair to their experience.

Artisan communities in Colombia

Artisan history in Colombia comes from the pre-Columbian times, when indigenous groups that used to live in the region developed the first objects to help them solving their material, spiritual and social needs (e.g. weapons, offerings, temple's decoration). The first information that was found about these objects arrived from the conquerors' chronicles, and from the archeological excavations. The main techniques used by the indigenous people were: basketmaking, goldsmithing, pottery and weaving. After 1500, with the arrival of Spanish and African cultures, some of the previous techniques tend to disappear, while others were transformed by the mix of new materials and tools. New techniques started to be developed, such as wood carving, wrought iron and embossed leather.

During the XVII and XVIII centuries, the European influence promoted the creation of Obradores, which were sort of workshops where the master artisan (usually original from Spain) would teach to young apprentices the techniques, so that after four years they could open their own workshop. This Obradores became important mostly in main cities, such as Bogotá. (Marroquín de Narváez M. T., 1990)

Even though necessities and production methods changed with time, many of these techniques remained, and are still passed on from one generation to the other. Industrialized manufacture has strongly affected handmade production, nevertheless, during the last years a new interest for artisan objects has arisen, mostly from international and touristic markets.

Is interesting to find some communities that still work with their traditional techniques and who see their work as an important part of their social, cultural, and spiritual life. A good example of it is the Wayuu community (which we will see in depth in one case study), where women improve their weaving skills for the sake of making the best objects for their family to sleep and to carry their belongings. They do not learn to sell; they learn to provide the best for their families, and in this

FIG 6 *Pre-Columbian Art in Colombia*

way, all the products they make have the cultural and historical baggage behind (Artesanías de Colombia, 2018).

Communities of artisans in Colombia are usually found in rural areas, where traditional techniques are still maintained, and industrialization is not strongly developed yet. In fact, just a small amount of all the artisans are placed in big cities and are mostly individuals who developed their practice by themselves, without the accompaniment of a community with the same background and history. Communities from rural areas are usually placed in small towns where most citizens know each other, share experiences and traditions, and where there is a predominant production technique and natural resource. Some of these communities have passed through difficult experiences such as violence related to guerrillas or drug trafficking (Artesanías de Colombia, 2020). This situation makes of these communities a particular scenario, in which the circumstances and previous experiences might make it harder for them to trust one another, or can boost their need for support and unity. In the case studies shown afterwards is explained how *some communities have tried to associate unsuccessfully, and some others have done it as a way to resist against their context.*

These associations are more common among communities that have a long tradition, but also in communities that are starting to develop manual techniques as a way to tackle social and economic difficulties. However, in territories with ancient knowledge and artisan tradition, is more difficult to find strong communities where people help each other and where resources are extracted and managed following sustainable protocols that are then divided in equal parts with all the participants of the community. In addition, in terms of sales, there is a constant competition between artisan to get clients first, even if that means reducing the price of their work to the minimum. This has created a sense of distrust and lack of unity in small territories with great production skills, that have not had the chance to be recognized because they are focused on their individual survival.

Case studies

Artisan communities in Colombia

Curití

Curití is a small town in Santander, Colombia. More than 1000 people in this town work in the production process of fique, the main material used by artisans in the region. *Fique* is a plant that after a process (usually manual) is transformed in a strong fiber that allows artisans to knit a large variety of products. This small town is one of the most famous ones in Colombia because of the long tradition of knitters it has, which comes from the pre-colonization times. An indigenous group called Guanes lived in this region and was already skilled with knitting cotton and fique (Cárdale de Schrimpff, 2008). With time, the material was used by the inhabitants as the main resource for producing bags, rugs, and all kinds of objects for the house. Before the 80's most of the production was focused on developing coffee bags for exportation, by then, one of the most profitable businesses for Colombia and for this region. During the 80's the development of new products and the visibility of the techniques they used, made of this small region a renowned area for craftwork in Colombia.

Nowadays, Curiti and its community, is one of the most important and big ones in Colombia. Different weaving techniques are used by artisans in this region, mostly two needles, crochet, and horizontal looms. Together, the six most important workshops from Curiti, created *Astecur*, an association that is looking to create a common brand for all the artisans working with fique and to find support to showcase their products (Artesanías de Colombia, 2017). In the next chapter we will see in detail which have been the results of this association.

FIG 7 *Artisan from Curiti* (Becerra, 2018)

Case studies

Artisan communities in Colombia

Wayuu

The Wayuu is an indigenous community that lives in the Guajira region, north of Colombia. They have a matriarchal social structure and have been able to adapt themselves to the difficult desertic weather, characteristic from the area. According to them, *Waleker*, the spider, was the one who taught the woman the weaving technique. The Wayuu is a community with a strong attachment to their culture, to their land and to their language (different from Spanish). Each one of the figures, *Kanas*, they create in their weavings, represents a natural or spiritual element, and the more complex the figure is, the more value the product has. While men work in agriculture or weaving hats, women have the important task to be excellent thread weavers, since they have to make all the objects their family needs at home. *Chinchorros* to sleep, *mochilas* to carry their personal belongings. Weaving for them is not just the commercial practice between them and the *arijunas* (foreigners), but is a way for them to express their feelings and desires, it is the knowledge they received from their ancestors and that has to be preserved (Artesanías de Colombia, n.d.).

The artisan objects made by this community are some of the most recognized in Colombia and in the world, since many designers have worked with them to develop contemporary creations, by using their technique and their figures. However, as happens with many artisan communities, most of the revenues from these collaborations do not arrive to the artisans but stay in the hands of big designers and companies, affecting them more than providing help. Sadly, their region has also been forgotten by the government, and artisans have to sell their products at any cost, in order to feed their kids.

FIG 8 Artisan from Wayuu community (Osorio, n.d.)

Case studies

Artisan communities in Colombia

Guapi

Guapi is a small town located in the region of Cauca, south-ovest of Colombia. It has access to the Pacific Ocean, and it is impossible to reach by car, being only possible to get there are by air or through the ocean.

The region has suffered for many years the violence from Colombia's civil war, added to the lack of opportunities and economic development that come from the government's absence in the area. Nowadays, four years after the peace agreement signed in Colombia, Guapi is still experiencing homicides of their main social leaders.

The community is formed mostly by afro descendants who use *Tetere's* tree fibers to weave hats, bags, and baskets that they use in their daily activities, but especially to sell in the main Colombian cities (Artesanías de Colombia, 2014). The community also works in lutherie. By leveraging the materials from the region, and the knowledge they got from the African ancestors, Guapi's community develops *marimbas*, a traditional instrument made from *chontaduro's* palm (Colombia Travel, n.d.). This knowledge has been carried on by many generations now, and artisan women from the area are trying to preserve it through projects like the one of *Coopmujeres*, which will be shown in the next chapter.

FIG 9 *Guapi, Cauca, Colombia* (Ariza, 2020)

Case studies
What has been done in Colombia

Artesanías de Colombia

www.artesaniasdecolombia.com.co

Artesanías de Colombia (ADC), is the biggest supporter of the artisan sector in Colombia. It is a company connected to the government of Colombia, as part of the Ministry of trade, industry, and tourism. Its main goal is to *increase the participation of artisans in the productive national sector, so that they can improve their level of life and income* (Artesanias de Colombia n.d.). This is done by giving support from different perspectives to the artisan communities: marketing, production, product innovation, exhibition, business. ADC also supports the big communities to join into associations (like the case of Astecur in Curití), but there are not projects yet that include small communities and single artisans from all the country. Even though is a good starting point for artisans to start participating in fairs and exhibitions, for ADC is difficult to assure the sense of community on each area, and to make sure that artisans are working in a faithful and clean way with their competitors. This has been an obstacle for associations that would have been bigger and could have got more impact than the one they had, because outside everything looked okay, but inside they were not working together.

From the interviews with Estiven and Luz Marina, who were both part of ADC's program, the expectations were bigger than the reality. Estiven thought that by being part of the group he would get in touch with other artisans and to create products together, but the only moments they had together with other artisans were during the lectures about general information regarding design, colors, textures, etc, while the design spaces were private and for each individual. This modality of work was a disappointment for him, since he expected more of a community experience, and was the reason why he decided to create his own group connecting different artisans.

FIG 10 Pottery from Santander (Becerra, 2018)

Case studies
What has been done in Colombia

Astecur

On 2011, 6 of the most important workshops in Curití joined an association called Astecur with the main objective of being together to tackle economic issues, to promote and protect a collective brand, reduce disloyal competition, and control the use of resources (Artesanías de Colombia, 2017). Even though the association had ideally in mind the common benefit of the artisans, and was supported by ADC, the comments from some artisans were that people joined looking for an individual benefit, and at the end they realized that there wasn't a real benefit from being together. Most of the master artisans retired from the associations or just stop participating in the meetings, not feeling comfortable about the way the association was managed.

What could be perceived was that the association was managed as a way to showcase the importance of the town in terms of tradition and knowledge among others, but there was never a real concern from the organizers to encourage a community sense inside of the town, and to engage people with the project or to compromise them with rules or moderation.

Coopmujeres

Coopmujeres (Cooperativa Multiactiva de Mujeres Productivas de Guapi) is a cooperative of women from Guapi, Colombia. The cooperative was born in 1992 and aims to empower women to become independent and self-sufficient through different productive activities, from bakery, to handcrafts. The cooperative is formed by 45 women, of which 12 are artisans between 35 and 60 years old, who decided to join to combine their effort and to become stronger together. Even though the artisan work is done only by women, the material's processing is done together by men and women, who take care of cutting it, dry it in the sun, and extracting its fibers.
The main goal of the cooperative is to face the injustice against women and to resist together. They are a strong group who have achieved many goals during the years, being the most importants the ones inside of the community. They finished their studies, they are teaching to younger generations, and destroying the misconceptions in their region about women.

During October 2020 the cooperative was developing a series of workshops with the women from the community to understand their main issues and concerns, in order to find common solutions together (Cococauca, 2020).

"Bolstering artisan networks also has powerful effects on the community, not just the individual. (…) idea to enhance the socioeconomic status of the women – with the ultimate end of enhancing their families and whole communities."

Gina Rogari, 2016
How Do Artisans Empower Their Communities?

Design for or with artisan communities?

As described in the previous chapters, the importance of artisans goes beyond the economic contribution they can have for a region or a country. Their work also carries the task of saving material and immaterial knowledge, with centuries of history behind and uniqueness from each part of the world. The problems of industrialization and mass production that the capitalistic business model imposes, have highly altered the way how artisan production works and the responses it has given to the crisis. Even if is paradoxical to say, design might have part of the fault, but can also have part of the solution for some of these problems. The development of industrial design and mass consumption promoted the ideal among people of buying new products every season, even if their quality is not good. This situation created a process in which huge amounts of products have to be created in order to respond to the demand, and their prices must be low enough for people to buy again in a short period of time. Artisanal products don't fit in this description. These products are usually done with the intention to last, are objects done with a lot time and precision, and for this reason their prices can't compete against the ones of industrialized objects. Fortunately, many organizations and designers have realized of this inequal situation and are working to create an opportunity for artisan techniques to survive.

UNESCO, as part of its work with culture, creativity and society, has developed a series of projects for the empowerment of the sector, called Crafts and Design, Building confidence: crafts for development. The activities go from the promotion of prices and awards for crafts, to the support in commercializing artisanal products internationally, through training, promotion and exhibitions.

There have been also different projects around the world in which designers go to work with an artisanal community, and help them to develop new products, to create a new business model or improve their production process. It is known that adapting crafts products into the market's demands can generate new products while maintaining the local expression. These new products can, of course, contribute to the economic development of a region and promote the artisanal knowledge. But, is this the only answer design can provide?

Most of the literature explains the importance of creating a bridge between design and artisan communities, in order to stop the depreciation of craft work. This is actually an important collaboration that can bring knowledge both for the artisans and for the designers (Tung, 2012). From one side can end up with the evolution of the artisanal production thanks to new technologies that come from industrialization (such as 3D printing). From the other side, as Sennet says (as cited in Tung, 2012), the craftwork establishes "a realm of skill and knowledge perhaps beyond human verbal capacities to explain" (p. 95), and designers should learn from it and appreciate it as an important part of our culture.

We can say that literature is mostly focused on a collaboration looking for product development, on how to create new products that satisfy the market and can compete against the industrialized production. In fact, there are already methodologies to co-create products with artisanal communities in a way that is not disruptive for them and in which they become part of the process (FIG 11).
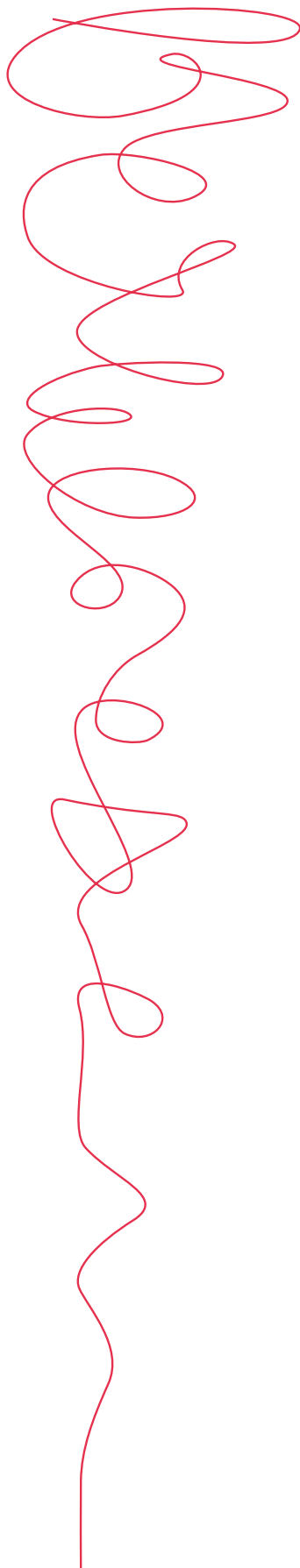
Fuzzy front end

Getting to know the local setting
Getting to know the craft and products
Getting to know the material

Identifying:

Problems
Opportunities
What to design

Design development

Sketching

↓

Discussing

↓

Prototyping

↓

Presenting

Shared knowledge ?

FIG 11 *Craft-design collaboration process* proposed by Tung (2012)

From the previous map comes out a question that I had first while working with Santander communities: how much knowledge is actually shared and embraced by artisans and designers through these collaborations? In many occasions the interactions developed are based just on doing a task rather than learning from the other. So the artisan creates beautiful products based on the designer guidelines, and the designer conceives new ideas based on the materials and techniques. If the artisans don't learn the right skills to keep this innovation going after designers are gone, it will stay just in a one-time collaboration.

The new role of design, with its capacity to foresee and ideate different scenarios and solutions, should not stay just in this main issue of product adaptation. According to research, the problems artisanal communities face, go beyond product design, and working just on it is like looking just at the tip of the iceberg. Design, and mostly service and strategic designers, have the capacity to look at the problems from a bigger perspective and to provide scenarios that include different stakeholders in the process. Thinking about the artisans as individual producers and hoping that the design of a new product will help them to improve their quality of life is naïve. They are small or medium communities that share knowledge, resources, and space (most of the times). This makes of them an ecosystem that shouldn't be broken apart for the design process, but that should be linked in order to see real results. *This is the reason why, even if there are projects already working on product design (e.g. in Colombia with Artesanias de Colombia), these communities of artisans don't show real improvements in their quality of life, because in the community there are many factors stopping their evolution as a group.*
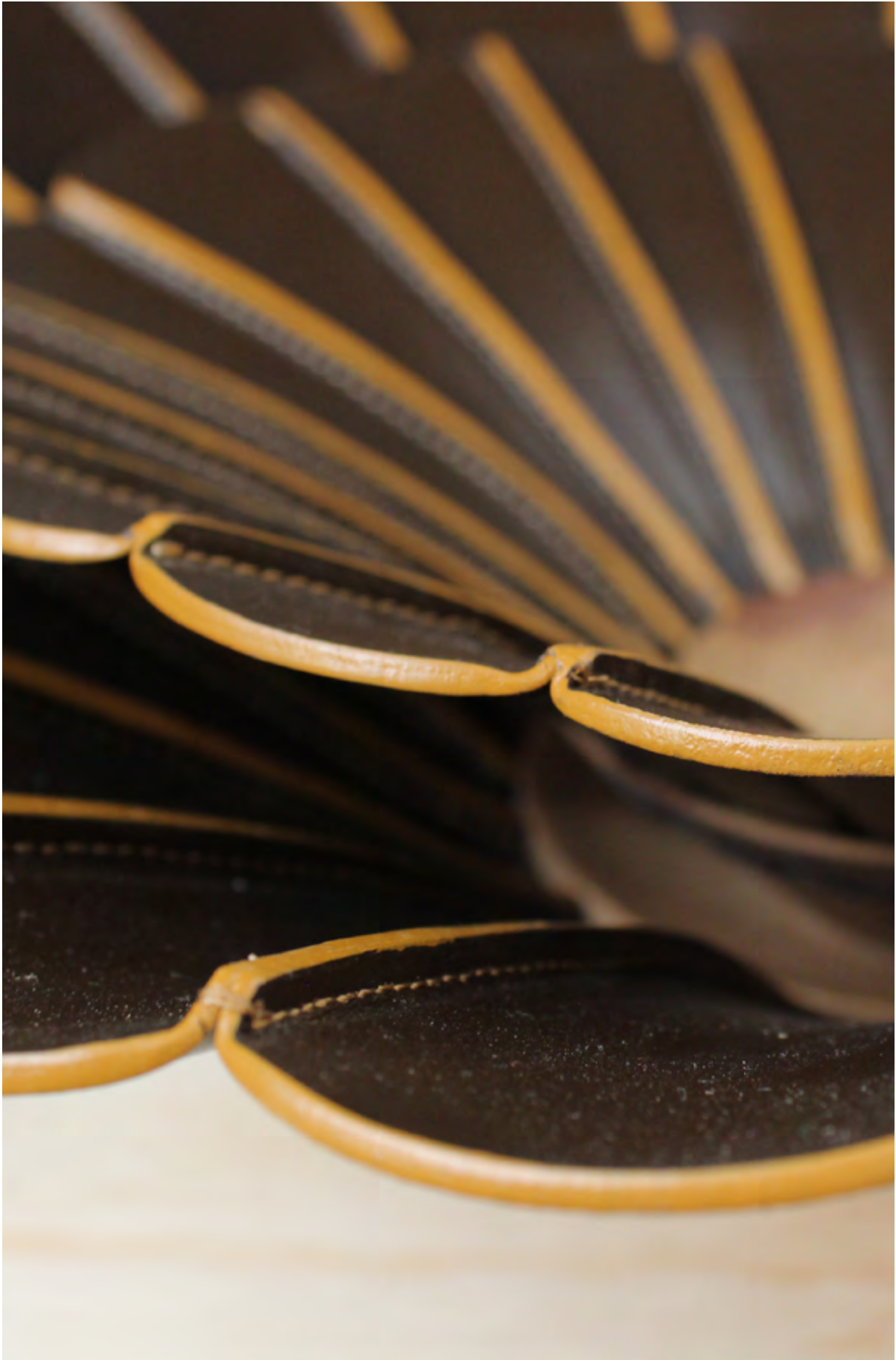
FIG 12 *Leather workshop* (Becerra, 2020)

DEEP DIVE WITH ARTISANS

Interviews and surveys to learn directly from them and their situation

Interview

Melciades Estiven Castro
Somos Mhyuscas community
Cota, Cundinamarca, Colombia

"We are giving a sense and a transcendence to products. The objects tell stories and the symbols have a meaning behind"

Estiven is a young designer and artisan from Colombia who has been working for some years now in the creation of a community of artisans with a common brand and purpose. He is part of an indigenous community called Muiscas, located in Cota, a municipality close to Bogotá. While finishing industrial design at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, he realized that he did not feel completely identified with the study program he was following and with the professional offers in Bogotá. He had been in touch with knitters from his community and he knew something about the technique, but it was until this moment when he realized with his brother, that they had the opportunity to save their tradition and to do something they could feel identified with. He founded Somos Mhuyscas, a brand that sells traditional Muiscas's knitted products made by him with people from his community, while communicating to external people the meaning of their symbols and their history. He has been working on the brand for 4 years now and has reunited a group of four people

who work with him. He says that even though they are not a big group, he has been selective when choosing who joins the group and who does not. *Members of the community must have some specific characteristics, that Estiven is able to identify after getting to know them and working with them for a while.* According to Estiven, the most important thing is that he is always clear and honest when explaining to them the conditions in which they are going to work together: the payments are not immediate, they have to wait until the product is sold to receive their money, and he provides all the materials and the selling channels. He explains to them the purpose of the project, which is showing and rescuing their traditions and their value, and as an outcome, he gets sure that the people working with him are actually interested in the purpose of the brand, more than in the money they will receive. He has encountered some issues while trying to develop his project, mostly regarding on how to deal with people. From one side it has been difficult for him to find the right providers of the resources, the ones who actually make the materials and not only sell them, since there is a huge rivalry among other artisans, who won't disclose their contacts, for fear of being copied or for the satisfaction of harming the others. This made Estiven's process harder to achieve, since it took him longer to get the contacts of people who could help him. *For him, having a net of contacts that can be used by all the artisans would be extremely helpful*, since it would not only make easier the process of developing products for them, but would also increase the collaboration between artisans who work with different techniques.

From the other side, finding the right people to be part of the community has been also a big problem, since most of people are not interested in the brand's common purpose, but just in receiving an extra income from a work they can do while being at home. There is also a big issue of lack of trust, people do not believe in someone else selling their products and they always feel like this other person is the one receiving all the economic benefits. *For the community to survive is important to find people who is aligned to the values and the main purpose of the group.*

FIG 13 *Estiven Melciades Castro Vásquez*

Nevertheless, is difficult to make this happen if the community does not have a recognized identity. This is what happens in Estiven's indigenous community and especially with younger generations. They are so in touch with the western traditions from cities like Bogotá, that they start losing their own identity, until they get to a point in which they do not recognize it anymore. They feel ashamed of their identity, when they should actually learn how to link it with other cultures. Is for this reason that an important step for a strong community is *to have a strong identity, with which young generations can feel identified and that they are willing to protect.* One option to make this happen is, according to Estiven, to teach kids at schools about these techniques and the importance of their traditions.

On the other hand, older people find it difficult to understand what to do, *they need a leader, or someone who guides them*, because they might have a good technique, but they don't know what to do next, and how to develop a project around it. This is a big common issue, the *lack of knowledge on how to manage the product development and how to make it real* in terms of business, costs, and brand. For Estiven, who has a degree in industrial design was hard enough, and he cannot imagine how must be for someone without any previous study, which is the case of most artisans in Colombia.

If Estiven could ask for something to make the work of his group better, it would be to have a space and the economic support to work all of them together, because he thinks that *communication and dialogue are the main foundation for a good relationship* between artisans, and that being apart makes it difficult for people to express their needs and to feel comfortable. He really wants to provide his colleagues a good working space and that they can get their main income from knitting, while they have a good experience.

Interview

Luz Marina Umaña
Independent artisan
Briceño, Boyacá, Colombia

"I would like to have young people coming to my house, eager to learn how to knit"

Luz Marina is an artisan from Boyacá, Colombia, who works in this field since she was 12 years old, after she learned the technique as part of the study plan in her school. She lived in Curití, Santander for many years, and there she learned how to knit with fique, the traditional material from the region. The hardness of the material made it difficult for her to use it at the beginning, causing her bleeding sometimes. However, it was her only income at the time, so she never gave up and she kept trying until her hands got used to the material. Even though she has knitted for almost 40 years of her life, she never learned about the history behind this technique and why it is so famous in Curití. I met her while I was working with Artesanias de Colombia and she was part of the group of artisans that would make products from Santander. She is a generous woman, open to try new ideas and who doesn't get frustrated from her mistakes but learns from them and finds solutions to keep going. Even if she made great quality products, she always worked for others, and her products didn't receive the recognition and value they deserved.

Right now, this is her only job, but the lockdown has stopped most of the sales, since her products are mostly sold abroad, in Puerto Rico and USA. Nevertheless, she keeps working and

trying new ideas, because according to her, this is the only job she wants to do, and she would not like to do anything else. Luz Marina has specialized in the creation of purses and lamps, and she is renowned for the innovation in the techniques and shapes of her products. Even if she knows her products are different, *she is always afraid about other artisans copying her designs and stealing her current clients.* Unfortunately, *she thinks not even her clients see the real value of her products*, they don't pay enough (around five euros for a handmade purse), and she thinks they would buy from anyone who could make a cheaper copy of them.

Luz Marina is now living in Briceño, Boyacá, a small town where she is the only one who knows how to knit. Even though there are kids who are interested in learning the technique, she feels that young adults do not show any interest to learn and are only stuck in their smartphones all day long. Nevertheless, *she would be glad to pass her knowledge and to teach kids the techniques she knows* and all the things they can make out of it.

She thinks the biggest obstacle for her to make more sales is the fact that *she does not know how to make proper publicity of her products*. She does not manage any social media channel and she lives alone, so there is no one who can help her or teach her, *however Luz Marina is open to learn, even if it's through online channels* (Messenger or Whatsapp).

Luz Marina has never been part of any community of artisans. She worked with Artesanias de Colombia and was part of the group of artisans that worked with the organization in Santander, however every artisan worked for their own profit and she never had a real interaction that could help her to learn from other artisans. She was living in Curití when the association of artisans from the town took shape (Astecur), but she was never part of it because she felt that she was never invited, and that it was closed to the few workshops that founded it from the beginning. Besides, she had to pay to join and she did not feel it would provide her enough benefits. However, she recognizes the advantages of being part of a community and she is open to be part of a group of artisans, in order to learn from others and to teach them what she knows, but also to contribute together to the development of new ideas.

Interview

Ana Isabel Aloima
Legal Agent of Coopmujeres
Guapi, Cauca, Colombia

> **"Our legacy comes from the abuse we have suffered. We are here to resist against difficulties and against women stigmatization."**

Ana Isabel is the legal agent of Coopmujeres, she is a strong woman who lives in Guapi and was one of the founders of the cooperative in 1992. Talking with her was quite interesting and she transmitted to me the strength she has, which has been reinforced during the years of the cooperative. According to her, the reason why *they started the project was to show the power of women and to break with the sexiest ideas that were mainstream* some years ago, and still are, in her town. The common characteristic all the women from Coopmujeres had at the beginning, was the abuse they were receiving, and the reason why they feel motivated to keep going, is to resist against the conditions they have to live in. *"We are here, and we are women. Women have been an important asset of Colombian development, and we are here to put our part on it"*.

She says that the main difficulties the cooperative is having are: the *lack of knowledge related to the virtual world*, because they haven't had the opportunity to learn, because they can't buy a smartphone, and because access to internet in her region is scarce and of bad quality. Currently, with the pandemic, things have got even worst, since is difficult for them to meet and they have to arrange meetings and product deliveries through phone calls. Overcoming these issues has been a challenge for them, especially since *their region struggles to get support and resources from the local and national government.* As Ana Isabel says, "It is like we don't exist in the map for them". Currently, the main help they are getting as artisan community comes from Artesanias de Colombia. Sadly, *one of the biggest problems they have comes from violence.* Cauca is a region from Colombia famous for the presence of guerrilla and out-of-law groups, who usually limit the access to land and resources for the small communities that live there. Because of this Ana Isabel and the other artisans from Coopmujeres *are not able to collect the fibers for weaving their hats*, and have to buy the resources from the indigenous groups who have access to them, and who sell them at elevated prices. Finally, they have the *problem of showcasing their products, since they don't have any knowledge about selling online*, so they can only sell through their physical store and through Artesanías de Colombia. According to Ana Isabel, when they have fights inside of the group, they try to talk them and to clarify them before they become bigger, and this has helped them to overcome the minor issues they have had "We have been through tears, laughs, sad moments, but also happy moments". My personal impression after the interview with her was that they are a strong and united community who have the clear goal of resisting against big external challenges.

After all this time, the cooperative finally has their own headquarters, they have been recognized by many organizations, and most of the members have grown their children and have finished high school and university thanks to Coopmujeres.

Currently, the focus of the group is to transmit their artisan knowledge to younger generations, and are working on a project that aims to involve young people from Guapi into artisan entrepreneurship, in order to rescue their cultural and traditional assets. They make a call in the town, and all the kids and teenagers who are interested can join the lessons every weekend. The project will finish on December, and even though they are looking for more resources to keep it going, they hope that at least these young people will have the motivation to keep working on the field of handmade products.

The interview with Ana Isabel was crucial to understand that external and internal issues are closely related, and that when external circumstances are good for all the community, the interest to be together might fade away, while when there is a common external problem to tackle, communities become stronger.

Surveys

Italian artisans
Facebook groups

The long tradition Italy has with handmade production awoke my curiosity about the current situation of the artisans, whose products are known around the world and are a synonym of quality and luxury. Even though the lockdown situation made it hard to find them, I was able to contact some of them from different Facebook groups and to ask them some questions. related to their biggest challenges regarding the work and the relations with other artisans.

From the answers received, for the 90% of them the artisan work was their main job, and 80% of them had been working on it for at least 10 years, so it is definietly not a hobby for them. When asking them about their connections with other artisans, 70% of them said they worked alone, and 90% considers they are not transmitting their knowledge to new generations in a proper way, so that techniques are getting lost. They feel the government is not supporting them enough, and on the contrary, are asking them for more and more taxes every time. Even worst, they consider that customers do not see the real value of their products and they do not have the skills and knowledge to increase the value or to show it in the proper way.

From ten people who answered the questions, just one of them was part of a group of artisans, while the others had not found a community that could give them enough advantages. In fact, regarding this topic, according to the artisans from the survey, the advantages of being part of a group are less than the disadvantages it would have.

The **main advantages of being part of a community were:**

1. The possibility to exchange advices about techniques
2. To see each other's products and discuss about them,
3. To discuss about possible prices and providers
4. To discuss also about sales and publicity.

In short, they want to have a strong network in which they can trust and that can provide support for all members.

However, the **disadvantages have stopped most of them from trying.** The most common answers where related with:

1. Difficulties to find artisans who think in a similar way
2. To have problems with plagiarism and boycott from others
3. To find limitations to join because of Italian bureaucracy.

In general they think it will be necessary to rethink the whole idea of artisan products, to give more value to handmade production, and to support artisan's identity, in order to reduce the competition between members of the community. Support from the government is also important, so that artisan production can have more economic benefits and spaces to showcase their products without paying extraordinary amounts of money.

Moreover, after analyzing the surveys it was interesting to see that one of the reasons why Italian artisan don't feel motivated to join is because they don't know yet of any community that has reunited artisans successfully, so they don't have any point of comparison in which they can set their goals. *Boosting artisan communities to join successfully will create the role model for more artisans to follow as inspiration.*

" (...) there is little knowledge from the public about artisan products and the value that comes from a unique handmade piece. "
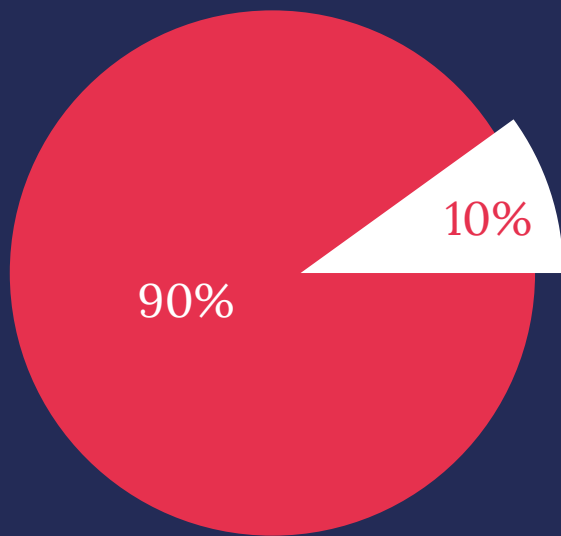
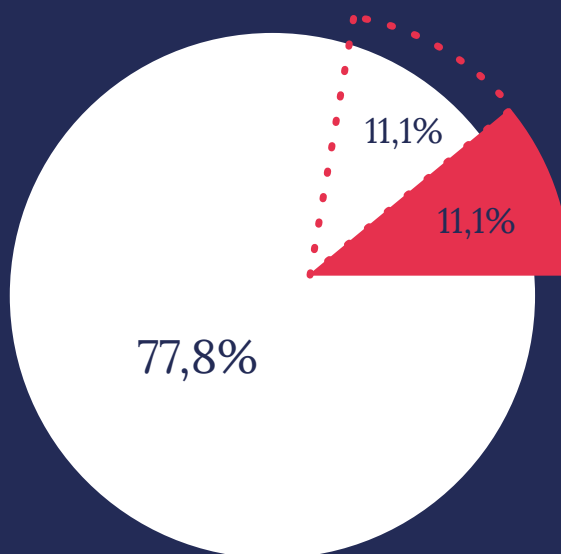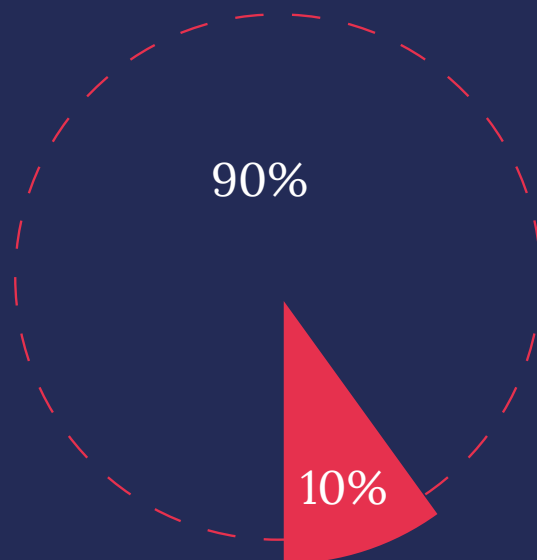## Is the artisan job your main job?

90%

10%

■ Yes, it's my main job
■ No, I have another job

Are you part of a group / community of artisans?

⬚ No
■ Yes

90%

10%

Why you are not part of any group?

11,1%

11,1%

77,8%

■ I haven't found any group with good benefits for me

⦂ I tried once and it didn't go well

LESSONS FROM ARTISANS

Conclusions and insights from primary
and secondary research
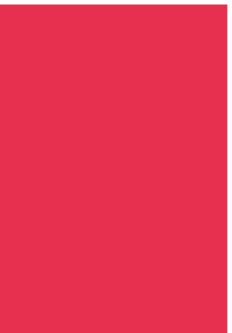
Colombia
Visual summary

National and international fairs to showcase products

Communities hitten by violence with no sources of income

Lack of knowledge on how to sale and showcase their products

Support from a governamental organization, Artesanias de Colombia

Lack of opportunities to sale their products

Rural areas difficult access for supporting programs (in marketing, design, business...)

Colombian artisans

Support focused mainly on big workshops, but not on individuals needs.

Lack of unity, individuals fighting for clients and resources

Younger generations are not interested in the family business

Practice seen as the onefor women with *nothing to do*

Practice seen as the only option when people don't have education

Positive aspects

Negative aspects

Italy
Visual summary

"Made in Italy" strong identity related also to tourism

Globally known for the prestigious characteristics of the products

Firenze, artisan identity and history

Associations of artisans CNA, Cofartigianato

Famous history of artisan's "botteghe"

Carta internazionale dell'artigianato artistico - Promote artisans in Europe

Few young people learning the techniques

Italian artisans

Economic difficulties (IVA increase, mall's competition)

Need to go out from Italy to get recognition for the work

Crisis post-covid. Small businesses might disappear, loosing all the knowledge behind

Too many websites trying to showcase the products, but lack of unity between them

Positive aspects   Negative aspects

Issues or design opportunities?

The research process was filled with a lot of personal information that I was able to gather from my previous experience within the artisan world, and I have to admit that this situation had me biased at the beginning, by delimitating the results that I wanted to get. It wasn't until I did the first interviews that I saw not only the problems the communities had, but also the elements that helped them to be successful, and was here where more interesting insights came to life. The problems that are visible at first are the ones related with external factors, because are the only ones shown to the world, but the most important part for successful of communities lies on their inside.

After talking with artisans from both countries, it was clear that there are two different kind of problems they are expressing. From one side there are the *issues related with the external environment*, such as: lack of support from the government, lack of value recognition from customers, lack of spaces to showcase their products, and lack of knowledge about online selling. From the other side there are *internal issues, related with how community members connect between them*, such as: poor communication between members, lack of trust between them, lack of common rules to organize the group, lack of real leadership and defined roles.

This has come to the result that, even though members of these communities know about the importance of being together and they want to keep transmitting their knowledge and identity, most of the associations, groups and communities fail in achieving their common goals and end up disintegrating. One of the conclusions from the communities who are struggling with internal issues and those struggling with

external issues, is that usually, internal issues become more important when communities don't have many external issues to worry about (e.g. Curiti). This town is recognized in Colombia for its artisan work and tourism, and even though they struggle to learn about digital tools, and to get support from the government, their real problems are related to how their community works and their lack of unity. From the other side, communities that have big external issues, such as violence, and all the consequences that come from it (e.g. Guapi), show a stronger bond of the community, and an objective to be together, because they realize that this is the only possible way to deal with the outer world.

In this sense, *while both communities might have crisis, and both communities could use help, for the sense of our solution, the communities like the one in Guapi are an example of success, are an example of a community that has a defined goal, the force and determination to keep going and to grow.* Even if they don't have the resources and are not internationally renowned, they are proud to be together, to transmit their knowledge and to show their identity.
On the other side, *communities like the one in Curiti, who have support, recognition and who make big sales around the world, are confused on what to focus their community goals. Are communities that don't understand the urgency to be together, and in opposition are competing to get more for each individual.*

As explained before, the toolkit can be useful for both communities, but it is important to see that *crisis* in this case is not necessarily related to external issues, but rather to internal conditions.

External insights

Lack of value given to handmade products
Clients do not give real value to artisan products, reducing their sale prices.

Lack of support to prepare the artisan sector in project development (in terms of business, costs, resources...)
Government and institutions don't show interest in educating this sector on these specific needs.
The fact that young generations are not involved in the process, excludes the sector from the last digital innovations.

Lack of spaces and knowledge to showcase the products
Lack of knowledge about e-commerce makes it difficult for artisans to show their products, especially during lockdown.

Context of violence and lack of natural resources
In Colombia, the violence in different contexts and the bad distribution of land for agriculture, puts a lot of limitations for the artisan work and makes it difficult to access the required natural resources.

Few support from local and national institutions
Even though artisan production is one of the main economic activities in Colombia, the government allocates every year less resources for the sector.

Internal insights

Lack of identity within the community
The mix of different cultures has weakened the community's identity, especially for younger generations who are more in touch with global cultures and might feel ashamed of their own.

Lack of a clear purpose and goals for the community
Empiric communities with little organization and no defined goals have it harder to find a motivation to keep going

Lack of trust between members of the community
Members fear to lose their clients or designs
They do not feel like they can rely on other members of their communities, developing usually fake relationships full of gossip and hidden competition

Lack of rules and of leadership to manage future issues
The horizontal organization of the communities and the different personalities of members makes it difficult for them to choose a leader or someone in charge of checking how things are going and what to do next for the group

Conclusions from research

These are communities who feel disappointed from trying and failing, who miss a direction and reason to be together, who think that as individuals, one against the others, they will become stronger. But they are wrong, these are communities of artisans in crisis.

As we mentioned before, one of the main reason for artisans to feel unmotivated to join a community is the fact that they don't know any successful community they could take as role model, and this could be because of two reasons:
1. There are none successful communities
2. This kind of success is not always shown outside of the community.
Of course, the second reason is the one I believe in.

So, what if we take these successful communities in which artisans are motivated to work together, and try to replicate the model into more communities? Which are these success elements that have made some artisan communities stronger?

Both from desk research and first-hand research some success elements came to life, and these are the elements we want to summarize and to transmit with MINGA.

How might we

How might we replicate internal success elements of artisan communities, to support them bonding in Colombia?

WHY A TOOLKIT?

How to know if this is the right solution
for the research question?

What is a toolkit and why is it useful?

"Complex issues with solutions that change from one part of the state to another and with a variety of audiences are likely subjects for a toolkit. Adaptable resources were needed, accompanied by training so local teams could use them successfully." (Monroe, 2000)

Toolkits are usually developed to offer guidance or advice to a specific audience, or to tackle certain situation. They are made of a set of tools that together address a particular purpose, according to Collins dictionary ("Toolkit", n.d.).

Even if lately toolkits are usually digital, they might come also in physical formats, according to the purpose and the audience it is designed for. Their use is important in situation that are just emerging, so they do not have defined processes to follow. Tools must be flexible and adaptable, so that different realities can use them according to their needs.

Depending on the context and purpose of the toolkit, it might be necessary to provide external consultancy for users, or even to train a local actor to play the role of the facilitator. This role will be important to use the tools to the 100% of their capacity and to keep the desired direction. Choosing an external or internal facilitator must be a choice that is aligned with the community and their needs. Even in the case of artisan communities some might benefit from a different solution. To give an example, in the community of Curiti, even if there are people who would do a great job in coordinating the activities, the lack of trust between the whole group would make it difficult for this person to work calmly. On the other side, being such an important community, they are used to receive external support and workshops, and they trust and rely on experts from outside.

Of course, not all artisan communities work like this. For communities in which members are close and trust each other, is easier to have a local facilitator, who is trained in the process and who clearly knows the different actors of the community, so to have a bigger influence in the whole process of the group. In conclusion, there will not be one single solution for choosing a facilitator, but it will be necessary to understand all the variables and the context in which the community finds itself.

Case studies
Toolkits

Community Toolkit

www.communitytoolkit.it

The Community Toolkit is a set of tools that aim to design communities, supporting their development and growth. The toolkit was designed by a group of women from different companies who have worked in important projects related with communities in Italy and who decided to join their experience with this solution. During 2018-2019 I had the chance to work with this strong group of women, who gave me the inspiration to develop a thesis project related with the support of communities.

The authors offer consultancy for personalized projects and masterclasses for people interested in developing the methodology by themselves.

The tools:

1. **Free to download from their website**

2. **Meant to be printed and filled**

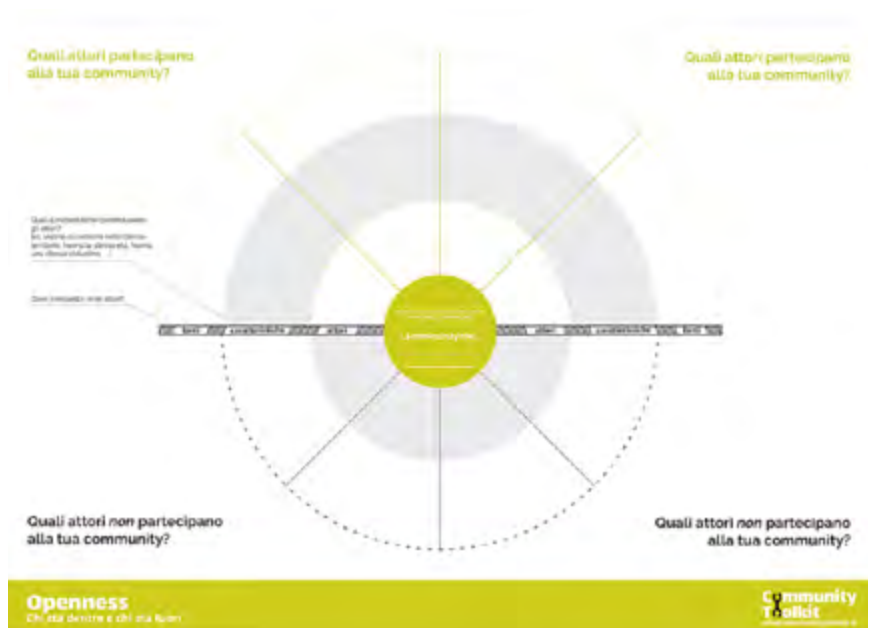3. **Include a short description of how to use them and filled examples**

FIG 15 *Openness tool*

Case studies
Toolkits

100% open innovation toolkit

www.100open.com

A toolkit that aims to help companies implementing open innovation. This is done through a set of different phases that start from setting the strategy, to collaborate and implement a business model. The offer changes according to the needs of each company, and even if the toolkit can be downloaded completely free from their website, they offer paid subscription services such as updates, training workshops, branding, and customized toolkit.

The tools:

1. **30 in total, divided in 7 phases**

2. **Free to download from their website**

3. **Meant to be printed and filled**

4. **Include the filled examples and a glossary**

FIG 16 *Open Innovation Manifesto tool*

Case studies
Toolkits

UN innovation toolkit

www.uninnovation.network/un-innovation-toolkit

A digital toolkit that allows UN entities to accelerate and sustain digital platforms. The toolkit can be accessed from any device, at any time. It is meant to be used by employees without any further support, so everything can be easily found in the digital platform. The digital experience starts with a diagnosis of the situation, in order to understand the required phase. The interface is highly interactive and engaging.

The tools:

1. **Are completely online**

2. **Are 21 tools in a framework of 5 modules**

3. **Even though the platform is highly graphic and interactive, the tools have too much text inside, making them long to read and difficult to understand**
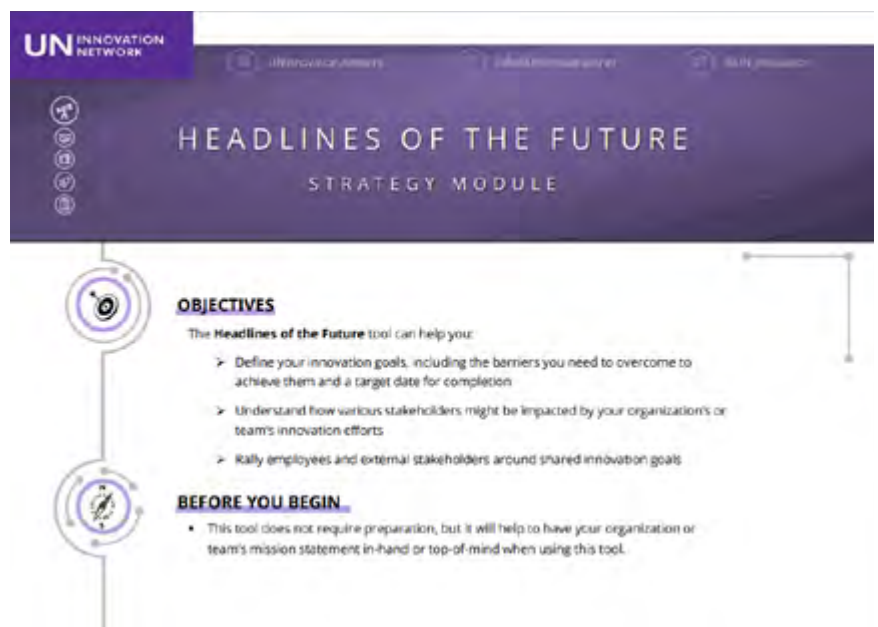

FIG 17 *Headlines of the future strategy module*

Design requirements

1. **Offline tools** to be filled individually sometimes and in group at decisive times

2. Tools that tackle the **main internal issues of communities**

3. Short and tools that have specific **characteristic elements of Colombian communities**

4. **Need of an internal or external facilitator** to guide the session

5. Tools that tackle **different issues from current community and business toolkits**

6. **Each tool must have an objective** and be part of a phase, which has a bigger goal

for

As explained
one of the basis
Respecting the rule
However, having rules
designed by superiors, an
people just do not follow the
people to follow, giving them the
them together, giving them the pos
possible to do and not to do.

This phase can generate some tensions if som
everyone else is looking for in the community
are looking for rules that are not in agreement
to hate with you the Community Purpose during this p
and that everyone has clear what they want to achieve
with the community, so the rules go in the right direction.

Make sure to start this phase when people are not tired
and have got *time to interiorize the results from the*
previous sessions.

Minga

Toolkit for artisan
communities in crisis

Why

MINGA is the result of a process in which a product service designer came together with the artisan world, to realize that the *focus design is providing to artisans should go beyond* the creation of new products.

The first time I got in touch with the artisan work and communities, was in Santander, Colombia, a region characterized by strong people, who are difficult to lead and to organize. Even though it was terrfying to arrive there as the new designer, who had just finished her bachelor degree and who came from another city; what I received from them was the support from a *community that was open to welcome outsiders, but that was not working to improve inside.*

Usually, we are told that the main issues artisan communities have are related to the lack of skills in terms of marketing, innovation, and business development, so this was the idea I had when I just arrived there. However, even though these problems exist, are generally pointed out as the result of the lack of external (governmental) support. By living next to the communities of Santander for around nine months, I was able to understand that the problems were not just related to externalities but were mainly the result of inner fights and disagreements. People from this region had knowledge, unique materials, tradition, and a great history of artisan ancestors, but they were not moving forward, because the community was not really cooperative inside. They were trying to show off as something they were not: a united community in which they worked towards common goals.
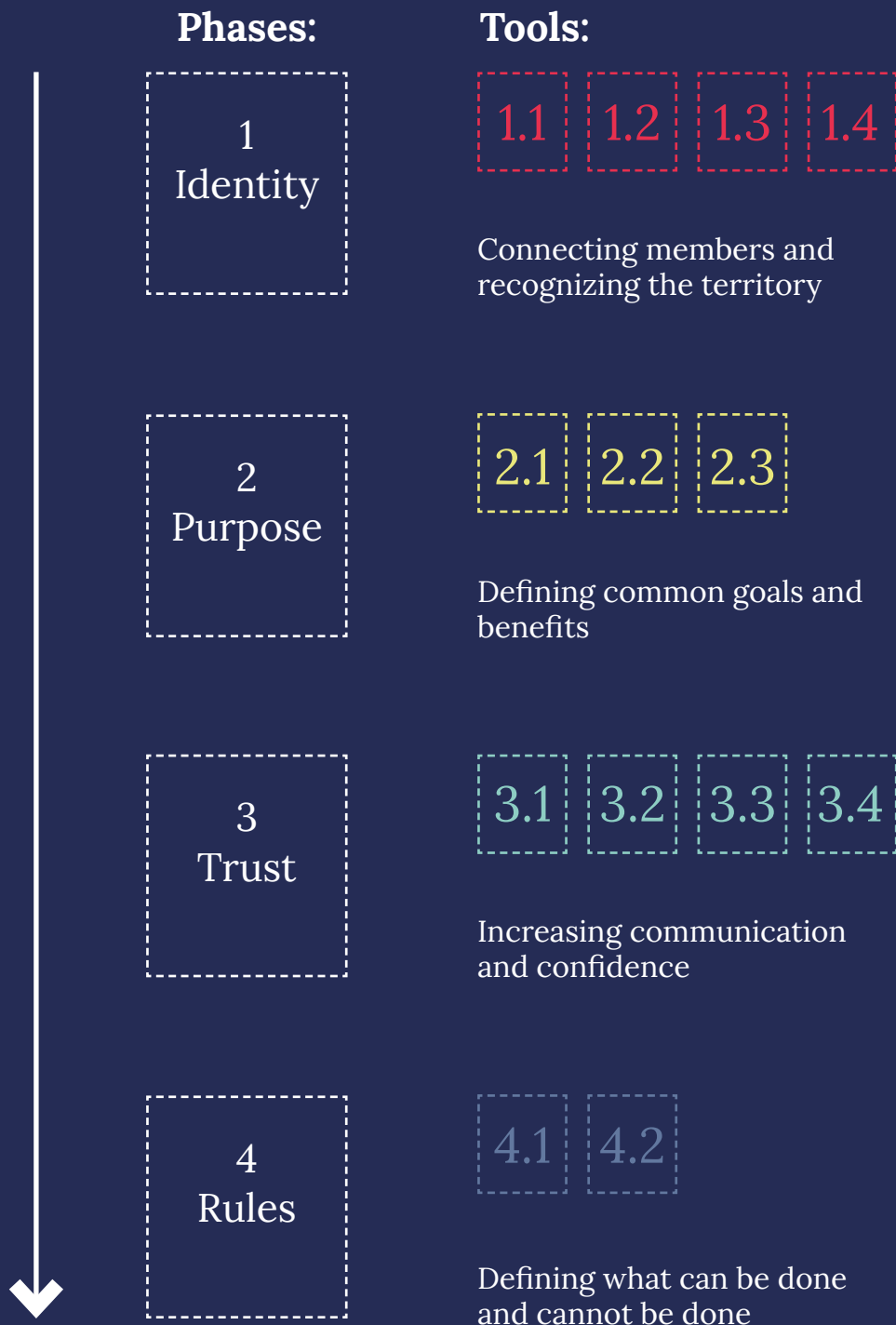
What

MINGA is a set of tools to be used by artisan communities in crisis. It is focused on the main internal issues these communities have, which are: lack of identity, lack of defined purpose, lack of trust and lack of leadership. There are a total of **13 tools divided into 4 phases**: Identity, Purpose, Trust and Rules.

The toolkit was designed to be filled physically during 4 sessions together with the participants, however, remote options can be implemented as well. It better if each session is done on different days, so participants can have a fresh start each time.

It is advised to follow the whole process when is the first time of implementation in a community, however, it's also possible to repeat some phases, or the whole process, after some time, if any of the conditions change.

Minga is not the solution for all the problems artisans have, and more work will have to be done about it. However, it is a way to start changing the perception of what design can do for the artisan sector and of the extra support they might need and that hasn't been considered yet.

How it works

Phases:

Tools:

1 Identity	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4
	Connecting members and recognizing the territory

2 Purpose	2.1 2.2 2.3
	Defining common goals and benefits

3 Trust	3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4
	Increasing communication and confidence

4 Rules	4.1 4.2
	Defining what can be done and cannot be done

Waleker, community weaver

Phases' objectives

Each phase plays an important role inside of the toolkit's final objective, and each tool works in agreement with these roles.

1 **The first phase, Identity**, is about giving to the community an inner look, alook into their territory, understanding how all members are connected and who is the person, or the people, who are trying harder to make these connections real.

2 **The second phase, Purpose,** is about giving a direction and a purpose to the community, to understand where they are headed and what are the main goals and the benefits they get.

3 **The third phase, Trust,** looks for the creation of trust between members, through the definition of clear communication moments, of support networks, and the recognition of members' skills.

4 **The fourth phase, Rules,** guides members to the creation of rules that can benefit the whole community and that are created and chose by everyone in the community, creating a deeper sense of compromise and engagement.

Final objective of the toolkit

Along with the whole process, one of the most important legacies from the toolkit is the *definition of the Community weaver and of the Community manager.* Even though they could be the same person, it is important that the Community manager has the characteristics we will mention later on. The *main job of this person will come after the process has ended, when there won't be any facilitator, and the community will have to follow the rules and the agreements they made during the sessions.* Even though this person's name is Community manager, their role is somehow different from the one of an online community manager.

We could define the *role of the community manager in general* lines as the one who:

1. **Makes sure** the rules of the community are followed by all members
2. **Listens** to members and solves conflicts in the group
3. **Provides** appropriate content for the community members
4. **Monitors** that every member follows their designated tasks
5. **Has a great knowledge** of social media tools

Now, when translating these tasks to our offline community, the tasks of *our community manager* would be:

1. Making sure everyone is following the Golden Rules they set together. Talking with the person who might have broken the rules and communicating to the community if the person continues to do it, so they can all agree on what to do about it.

2. When there are conflicts, this person will be in charge of talking with the involved people and to try to solve the issues, while keeping a fair environment.

3. Organizing meetings and workshops that could be interesting for the whole community, and that should be related with the skills members are interested in learning.

4. Making sure every member works on the tasks that were assigned to their role and that they are aligned to the description of their role.

5. Having knowledge of how to use social media, or having the possibility to contact someone who can help them in using them (family, friends).

Do you have in mind someone in your community who has these (or some of these) characteristics?

Parts of the toolkit:

How to use the tools?

1.1

Look at our territory

Why: This tool is based on the *mapping tool* (1), a tool useful to motivate people to talk at the beginning of the workshops.
Understanding our territory and how we are all related to it, is the first step to understand our community and ourselves. The objects we create as artisans come from these resources, from these people and from the previous history of this region, and is for this reason that recognizing them should be a priority.

Inspiring questions:
- How well do we know this territory?
- How much can we tell about it?
- Where will be our community inside of this territory?
- How could we help it?

Time: 30 minutes

Needed:
- ☐ Look at our territory template (can be also done in a bigger paper if needed)
- ☐ Places' cards cut already
- ☐ Markers

Steps:
1. All the group must be organized around the template, and one person will hold the marker. This person will be in charge of drawing first, even though the task can be carried on by someone else later.

2. The first member will start drawing the map of the town, just how he/she remembers it. It does not matter if the map is not 100% realistic, but it matters that everyone understands what they are drawing. It is also important that the map is as big as the whole paper, since many places will be added in the next steps.

3. If someone else thinks there is something to fix, they can do it, however, as we mentioned before, fidelity at this step is not necessary.

4. When they all agree on this first shape of the map, they will take the cards of places and start placing them according to their location in the outlines map they just made.

The adviced way to use the toolkit is with the **support of a facilitator**, this person can be someone from the community trained for this purpose, or someone external. Choosing the person for this role is important and it might change according to each community, since not all of them are open to receive external assistance. Nevertheless, the role of the facilitator is crucial for the proper development of the tools since this person will be in charge of keeping the goal of the process. At the beginning of the toolkit there are some general rules for the facilitator, that will support the correct development of the tools. Moreover, at the beginning of each phase there will be a short paragraph with tips for the facilitator, that will explain the goal of the phase and will provide some advices to achieve the best result possible.

Each tool is made of an explanatory section plus its template. In the explanatory section members will find the next information:

Why: Reasons why the tool is important in the process, and where the tool comes from

Inspiring questions: a list of questions that can help members to fill the template

Recommended time: Advised time to fill the template. Even though sometimes it might take longer, is recommended to follow the times, so members do not get tired during the sessions.

Needed: Materials needed from previous tools, or extra materials to fill the templates

What: Specific steps to follow for each tool

Output: What should be done and what tangibles should they have when the tool is finished

Each tool is accompanied by an **example template**, which is the same template they have, filled already, so members can see what can of information each tool should have.

In the case of the purpose, goals, benefits and stories, there are also **starting phrases**, that will help participants to complete the sentences they are required to fill in the tool.

In case there are any doubts on the meaning of some word mentioned during the process, there is the **glossary**, where must of the definitions are listed, so they are all aware of what they are talking about.

Finally, **tools are imagined to be filled physically**, so they must be printed, and the cards (when needed) must be cut. This does not mean that is impossible to do the sessions online with the help of collaborative tools, but some of the sharing and collective environment might get lost without having a physical interaction.

Phases & Tools
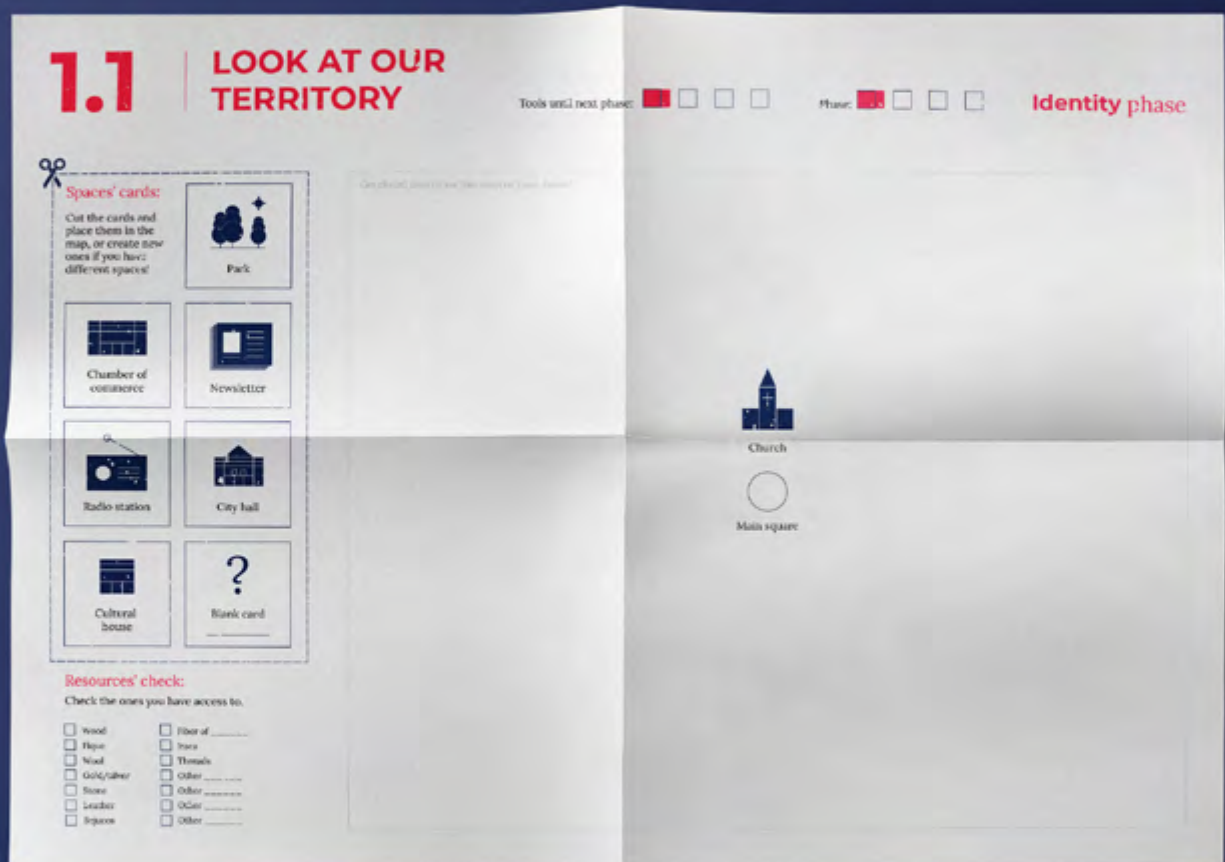
Identity phase

Breaking the ice between community members and showing them how they all share stories and spaces. Giving members a reason to start chatting, and forcing them to tell stories related with others, creates a better environment, and increases trust.

Tools

1.1 Look at our territory
1.2 Tell a story about us
1.4 Waleker, the Community Weaver
1.5 Our ID card

1.1 | LOOK AT OUR TERRITORY

Phase: ■□□□ | **Identity** phase

Spaces' cards:
Cut the cards and place them in the map, or create new ones if you have different spaces!

- Park
- Chamber of commerce
- Newsletter
- Radio station
- City hall
- Cultural house
- Blank card

Resources' check:
Check the ones you have access to.

- Wood
- Paper
- Wool
- Cold/silver
- Stone
- Leather
- Frames

Church

Square

1.2 | TELL A STORY ABOUT US

Tools until next phase

Phase: ■□□

House's cards:
Cut them, put your names on it, and place them in the map of the town. Plus...You can always draw more of them if there are not enough!

Stories templates:
You can choose one of these templates, or make your own to tell a postive story about someone else.

I have a nice memory of that time when_____

Some years ago there was that time when_____

When I had just arrived to town_____

Once when I had some issue about_____

I will never some issue about_____

It was ... has always supported m

1.4 | OUR ID CARD

Tools until 2 next phase

Phase: ■□□□ | **Identity** phase

Multi-Purpose

1 What do you all have in common:
Is it the technique or the materials you use? The place where you live?

2 What do your community members do:
Do you use different techniques? Which ones? Or which is the one to which you focus?

3 Who is/are your Walaker(s):
Take them from the questions box.

's
ID card

4 What are the resources/spaces we can have access to:
Write down all the ones you found with the 1.1 tool
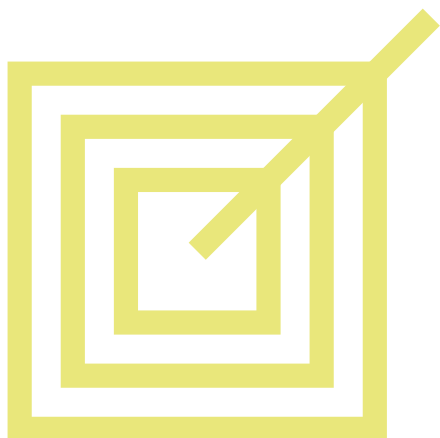
Purpose phase

At this point of the session, members should feel more comfortable with talking, and sharing their ideas. This feeling of comfort is important because at this point members will need to share what worries them and what makes them proud about their community, but most important, they will need to imagine how they want their community to be, and creativity only unleashes in a secure relaxed environment.

Tools

2.1 Inside out
2.2 We imagine
2.3 Setting the direction

2.1 INSIDE OUT

2.2 WE IMAGINE

2.3 DIRECTION WHEEL

Trust phase

One of the basic pillars for a healthy community is trust. As we all know building trust is not something easy or fast to do, however, there are some actions that can help communities to improve their trust towards the community and its members. With the next tools in this phase, the group will go through four different categories of trust: Trust in the competences, Trust in agreement, Trust in communication and Trust in care.

Tools

3.1 Skills sharing
3.2 Let's agree
3.3 Keeping in touch
3.4 Guardian angel

3.1 | SKILLS SHARING

Let's find the skills each member has, so we make sure they have the right role in the community.

	Member	Skills to share/teach	Skills to learn

3.3 | KEEP IN TOUCH

Is everyone aware of what happens in the community? How can we make sure everyone has access to the information?

Who is the communicator:
With the support of:
Who to contact in case of emergency:

1. Official online channels	2. Official online times	3. Emergency online channel	What IS an emergency?
	5. Official offline times	6. Emergency offline channel	What... emer...

3.4 | GUARDIAN ANGEL

Who will take care of each other? Choose someone who will support you in case of need, and who will inform you about the news when you couldn't get them.

Guardian angels' DOs:

Guardian angels' DON'Ts:

Member	One way or both ways?	Guardian Angel

Rules
phase

As explained by Elinor Ostrom in her book The Commons, one of the basis of a strong community are rules. Respecting the rules makes the system work harmonically. However, having rules does not seem fair when they were designed by your superiors, and this is one of the reasons why people just do not follow the rules. The best solution for people to follow the rules is to have them in the design and decision table, giving them the possibility to decide what is possible to do and not to do.

Tools

4.1 What is important for us
4.2 Golden rules

4.1 | WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Rules' cards

Rules' cards

Rules' cards

Communications

Community meetings

Roles

Payments

Delivery

Resource management

Other

Other

Other

Tools until next phase: Phase:

Rules phase

4.2 | GOLDEN RULES

YES

NO

Does it benefit the majority of members?

Is it easy to monitor?

Golden Rules

This is the end!

Tools until next phase: Phase:

Rules phase

VALIDATION SESSION

What are the thoughts on the toolkit from a community of artisans in Colombia and how they get along with the tools?

The session
Somos Mhuyscas community

When the first draft of the toolkit was designed and the tools were coherent with MINGA brand, a validation session was organized with the muisca artisan community. The goal of the session was to share this first toolkit with some of the artisans, and to involve them in the process of design. It was difficult to unite online artisans from different communities because they usually have difficult schedules to organize and have many struggles with their internet connections.

The session was done with Melciades Estiven Castro Vasquez and his brother, Camilo Andrés Castro Vasquez, both artisans from the muisca artisan community. They were both really open to support the development of this project since the research phase, and hopefully are going to be the first ones to try it out in real life.

How was it done

The session was done completely online, and the initial idea was to divide it in an explanatory part that would be followed with the development of one phase (purpose), through a collaborative application (Miro). By this point of the process the purpose phase was the one that was not completely well defined, and had many issues related to explaining and understanding it. The scarce internet connection they had made difficult for them to use the application, so at the end it was better for them to have the tools downloaded while we talked through the phone. At the end, the session was organized in the following steps:

1. The session started with a short presentation that introduced the research done and its results, the main issues artisan communities are facing. This introductory part was to explain to them the reason to work for those specific issues and not different ones.

2. After this introduction, a short description of the toolkit was done, explaining its main phases and objective.

3. Then, we went deep into looking at each tool and explaining how they had to be filled and what was the objective of each one of them.

4. During the purpose phase I asked them to share with me how they would fill the tool, and to tell me where they would be confused. Deeper support was required during the second and third tool, making clear that especially the third one was not so easy to communicate and to understand.

5. During each phase they told me their opinions about it, and when we finished them all, they gave me the general feedback about the toolkit.

FIG 18 *Estiven Melciades Castro Vásquez & Camilo Andrés Castro Vasquez*

Conclusions from the session

1. The first result from the session was the modification of the third tool in the purpose phase. It was hard to explain and to understand for young people like Estiven and Camilo, and as they told me, it would be even harder for older people without any previous education.

2. Another conclusion from the session was that not everyone would have the knowledge and intention to write down their thoughts, they like to talk, but not to write. In this case, the facilitator, or other members, should be ready to help them by listening and writing down their comments.

3. Because of the reason mentioned before is important to share the whole process with all the members, no one should be left out of the session. In this sense, they recommend that tools should be filled in big boards, or big papers, in which everyone could see and leave their comments.

4. According to them the tools were too long to develop in one day, and from one side artisans might get tired fast, from the other side, they usually have tight schedules.

5. They think is interesting and useful to have this kind of tools, because artisans usually do not know their own context and the other people around them

6. One of the most important aspects in which the toolkit should help artisans should be to identify a leader who can organize and manage the community. However, one of the requirements according to Estiven and Camilo is that this person is young and capable to use digital tools that can help them to make sales online.

7. They believe that rules are crucial for a good business development, because in term of prices, setting a minimum price is important if they all want to sell without affecting the competitors.

WHAT COMES NEXT

What should be the next steps of implementeation?
What should be the future steps to create better
interactions between artisans and designers?

Artisans in Colombia

An interesting conclusion from the talks and sessions I had with some artisans, was that it is important to create networks in the sector. Networks to help them find the right resources, networks to learn from others, and networks to support them. This is a nice idea that would be worth to develop in the future, which is finding the way to create alliances between universities and companies, so that they could sponsor and take in charge artisan communities, to help them in some specific aspects (business, education, brand, innovation...). There are many areas in which these projects could help artisans, but not with short projects, but with some kind of mentorship relation, in which they could get really involved with the communities and could generate true impact for them.

Nowadays, Artesanias de Colombia helps artisans to showcase their products on fairs (and this is currently their only option to make big sales), but according to artisans, this support is not enough for them to learn about innovation in products, or how to improve their business and sales. This creates a relation of dependence from the artisans towards the company since they do not get the tools to really succeed by themselves by selling their products in the current market.

Designers and artisans

For this communities of artisans, is not enough that a designer goes and tells them what product to do, with what color and for what date. They appreciate when designers take the time to talk with them, when they care and they learn about the technique they use and the constraints they have. This is important for many reasons:
1. This is the only way in which designers can propose a product that is coherent to the artisan's techniques and materials.
2. Is the best way to create a relaxed environment for artisans to feel free to share their thoughts, opinions, and ideas for designs.
This second step is quite important, because when artisans feel that they can be part of the design process, they'll keep doing it even if the designer is not around anymore, and this should be the result of the interaction, to give them the tools to keep applying those learnings.

Even though designers from Artesanias de Colombia are required to get involved with the community in which they are working, artisans say the methodology is not working well, since they do not feel prepared to work without the designers, they lack a lot of knowledge and are not reaching the required amount of sales to have a good quality of life (one of the goals of ADC). There could be many reasons behind this (lack of right preparation of designers, lack of time designers has for each community, etc), but this is not important now. The important thing is to understand that this methodology is not working, that something new should be proposed, and that maybe the contribution designers could provide for the artisan sector should be of a different kind, more focused on preparing them for the time when they are not accompanied anymore.
The future steps should start thinking about new ways of interaction between designers and artisans, in which designers have a role of facilitators, who help artisans to develop their projectable skills and to adapt themselves to the needs of society. The current way of work is not being successful in Colombia and is benefiting just some of the artisans, from the big spectrum of communities and people who are actually in need.

The toolkit

After the conversations with artisans, it was clear that they need a lot of support, they have a great ancient knowledge and can make beautiful things, but without the right tools, their products might never get out from their workshops. Even though the toolkit won't solve all the issues they are facing, it might help to make them aware of their context, to help them get along with other people from their community, to find someone who can lead and organize them towards the same goals, and to start proposing new ways of interaction between designers and artisans.

The toolkit was well received by Estiven Castro, from SomosMhuyscas, and he would be interested to test it in real life not just with his community, but with different communities he has got the opportunity to meet. This would be a great way to start assessing the tools, but also to start generating new conversations with artisan communities from Colombia about their needs, moving from the recurrent conversations focused on product development. Hopefully, the toolkit will not be the same in some years, and will have been useful for artisans and designers to create new methodologies and tools appropriate for their specific times, contexts, and needs.

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