Participatory design for craft sustainability in rural areas: a multi-sited approach

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1 Abstract
This ongoing doctoral research is to thoroughly explore what opportunities are available for rural-based craftspeople to address the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8, 12, and 13 through the practice of their craft, specifically in China and the UK. This research project discovers the role of participatory design in helping rural-based craftspeople add value to their craft practice and balance selling prices against hidden costs, which will stimulate the development of a creative economy and reinforce local cultural identity. This study aims to develop an effective strategy for rural crafts sustainability and create an evaluation system to gauge the sustainability of crafts in these areas.

The need to achieve SDGs is urgent today; this post-pandemic era has impacted people’s lives with continuing climate change, increasing globalisation and inequalities of opportunity (Panneels, 2023; Phillipson et al., 2020). In this uncertain situation, craft practice has become an alternative approach for responding to present-day challenges (Chen, 2022; Gudowska, 2020; Luckman & Thomas, 2019; Marchand, 2017; Zhan et al., 2017), including limited resources, slow-growing economies and sustainability requirements. However, sustainable development research in the craft sector has been primarily urban-centred (Lowery et al., 2020). Against this background, the value of rural-based craft practice is overlooked in the sustainability transformation process. The studies of design for sustainability tend to concentrate on the evolution of products and production processes (Ahmad et al., 2018; Buchert et al., 2017; Shi et al., 2017). The special challenges local craftspeople face have been ignored, such as craft-related education, the support of locality politics and marketing skills. These challenges affect local crafts’ sustainability, relevant to inheriting traditional crafts and developing a craft economy. Therefore, this research project focuses on the sustainable development of rural craft practices and the connection between people and places in a dynamic world.
Qualitative comparative research was employed in this study to investigate two creative rural areas – Fife in Scotland and Chongming in China. Chongming and Fife are both culturally active, with various local crafts and craft-related activities (Ferraro, et al., 2012). Fife has a long history of creative practices driving local development since the mid-twentieth century. Chongming is a world-class ecological island and has been recommended as a model of green economic development suggested in the UN Green Economy textbook launched by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) (William Brittlebank, 2014; Yuan et al., 2003).

This multi-locale study uses multi-sited rapid ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Saukko, 2003) methodology to better understand the sustainable development of the craft sector in different cultural, economic and environmental contexts. In this case, case study (Yin, 2014), semi-structured interview, participant observation and focus group methods have been employed to demonstrate the sustainability challenges and needs of craftspeople living in Fife and Chongming. The long-term goal of this research project is to expand work beyond Fife and Chongming to consider how its appropriateness in different places will promote holistic sustainability through the transformative design process in the rural craft sector.

References
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