

LINKING CRAFT PRODUCTION AND EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN: TRANSITIONS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE BUSINESS MODELS

Crafts in Pakistan are fascinating and omnipresent. Expensive labels highlight the exquisite of the hand-made, while cheap mass markets feature crafted everyday products. Producers though are vulnerable to financial exploitation and hazardous working conditions. They are usually the weakest link of the value chain, subjected to inconsistent order placements, poor infrastructure and insufficient exposure to the market. Nonetheless for people in low-income environments having a craft skill can offer an opportunity for a significant contribution to a household's overall income, especially for women.

This research examines management processes of designing, producing and merchandising craft products. It asks how the producers' position can be strengthened on a structural, reflective and behavioral level: How can craft business models become more sustainable and inclusive for producers? What can they do themselves to improve their situation? What support is required from other stakeholders?

The main research method is an analysis of case studies in Pakistan and India, conducted through extensive expert interviews, conversations, group discussions and field visits. Case studies are either craft businesses or grassroots development organizations and initiatives offering vocational training to producers with the aim to link them to markets. As such this design research is located at the intersection of strategic design, development aid practices, sustainable business models and the socio-cultural and socio-economic meaning of craft in the sub-continent against the backdrop of colonial history. While different stakeholders' experiences are looked at, particular attention is paid to the perspective of the producers, especially successful and less successful strategies towards their empowerment. The aim is to develop tools that enable producers to assess opportunities and limits in their environment realistically themselves, so that they can become self-empowered business partners rather than aid receivers or cheap labor.

- Gwendolyn Kulick -