

The Role of Art Education Teacher's in Developing Designs of Traditional Crafts in Oman: A Field Study

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The IAFOR International Conference on Education- Dubai 2016
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper is devoted to a review of the literature that covers all the topics related to the role of art education's teacher in developing designs of traditional crafts in Oman. These topics can be mostly grouped into two main parts. The first part explores the most significant stages in crafts enterprises' historical developments including the Art and Craft Movement, the Bauhaus and developments in crafts enterprises after the Second World War (post-war period). The historical contexts of these movements will help in identifying the challenges facing developing crafts designs and this in turn can help to reflect on the particular challenges for Omani crafts enterprises within a historical background. The second part of this paper will be dedicated to evaluating the PACI's crafts designs in this research on one hand and the role of art education teacher in developing designs of traditional crafts in Oman as a major objective.

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Part One: Crafts Enterprises and Objects Designs: Historical Background:

In this part of the literature review the researcher will highlight the most significant stations in crafts enterprises' historical developments to pave the way for the next part, which will be focused on an Omani craft enterprise represented in the PACI particularly. Consequently, this part of the research will investigate the Art and Craft Movement, because it was the first movement that dealt with the challenges and weaknesses of crafts in general and craft theories in particular, where the founders of the movement established the movement to face the negative consequences that affected western societies (especially Britain) as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 19th century (Cumming & Kaplan, 2004). Also, this part will discuss the Bauhaus Movement and its influence on crafts theory and enterprise developments where its influence remained until the 1950s in the USA. The Bauhaus' new concepts at that time caused changes in the crafts areas creative industry, especially in training/education, machine involvement and elevating crafts to be on the same level as other visual arts in society. Finally, this part will cover the most important developments in crafts (and craft enterprise) after the Second World War in the West, where thoughts, movements, theories, craftsmen groups, craft education and schools became uncountable and so very hard to be fully documented.

Arts and Crafts Movement:

There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of William Morris in establishing the Arts and Crafts Movement. But it is important to understand that the movement had other originating sources (Naylor. G, 1980). In his book *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, Gillian Naylor dedicated a part in his work to explaining the sources that helped to establish the movement in the second half of the 19th century (p.11). Naylor emphasised that the architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812 –1852) and his work '*True Principles of Christian Architecture*', was one of the works that smoothed the way for the movement to emerge. Also, the 1835 Committee, which was concerned with industry standards, was another step toward the creation of the movement (ibid, p.15). Then Naylor considered the endeavours of Henry Cole, in the Felix Summerly venture, as another step towards creating the Arts and Crafts Movement, in this venture Henry Cole specialised in making industrial designs which went into production later, such as children's books, tea-pots and other items (ibid, p.18). The last of the sources, according to Naylor, is that organising the 'Great Exhibition' in the middle of the 19th century (other references specified 1851), and that the exhibition's real value came about because it "was first international exhibition ever to be held, and it enabled the British to measure their achievements against those of other nations" (p.20). After all these previous actions, the path was smoothed for the emergence of the Arts and Crafts Movement (ibid, p.22).

The Guild can provide a hidden objection against the impact of the industrial age in England, and it may also provide a theoretical background for the practicing artists and craftsmen to express their protest as well, but through their art and crafts production. This is actually what happened when William Morris converted Ruskin's utopian thoughts into his company later. In fact, Bruce Metcalf (1999) emphasised that William Morris's real contribution to modern crafts, rests on his suggestion that craft is supposed to have entered the world of theory as a result of his being influenced by the writings of John Ruskin. Also, Morris was not only influenced by Ruskin's theoretical writing on labour dignity, but he practiced them in his studio. In other words, Morris "broke an important barrier, for he made it possible for his many followers to engage in the work that had previously been reserved for the lower classes" (ibid, p.3). (Bruce Metcalf recorded his first protest against propaganda which placed crafts and craftsmen in lower positions, compared with art and artists in his article "*Crafts:*

Second Class Citizens?" (pp.1-4) in 1980). The above brief historical background regarding the ACM showed how social and cultural changes in any society can influence craft industries in general and crafts enterprises in particular.

Studying the challenges for crafts enterprises required deep understanding of the Arts and Craft Movement, as a craft movement that was established to face its periods crafts' challenges. This view is supported by Gabriel Craig (2008) in his work *'Craft and Culture Reform'*, when he suggested that "to understand the resurgence in hand production in the first decade of the 21st century, it is helpful to understand the role that hand production played in earlier industrial reform movements" (p.1). He also asserts that before the Industrial Revolution (mid-18th century) everything was made by hand, and in the late 19th century labour reform joined other reform movements such as the reforms suggested by Karl Marx and William Morris. The most distinguished crafts historian and reformer, William Morris, placed what he called 'Modern Crafts' in a larger social context, including labour issues, social justice and consumerism (Metcalf. B, 1999). This led craft to be treated as a tangible product accompanied by a wider subject matter (intangible heritage). This wider discourse, was not only about utilitarian objects to be used on certain occasions (ibid). Perhaps one of the most serious weaknesses regarding Omani traditional craft (represented in the PACI crafts enterprises) industries, is ignoring intangible cultural and traditional heritage expressions, which sometimes are considered as a subject matter of crafts as part of broader material cultural assets. In fact, the PACI crafts enterprises stresses the importance of function, and dissimilar to fine art (e.g. painting, sculpture), 'function' in crafts making is considered as the 'subject matter' as Howard Risatti (2007) asserted in his work *'A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression'* (pp.448-452). But this cannot be an excuse to ignore social and cultural contexts by the authority in its enterprises, where these contexts also form craft's subject matter.

Until the first decade of the 20th century, the Arts and Crafts Movement continued to be a movement which raised debates (e.g. fighting machines predominance, preserving craftsman skills, honesty in use materials, protecting craftsman status etc) , especially when Europeans started to be involved in the movement in Great Britain (Naylor, 1980, p.184). Similar to this movement, the above debatable issues exist in the PACI crafts enterprises' contemporary discussions. It is worth remembering that a strong relationship exists between the ACM (debatable issues) and the PACI (challenges), but it is also important to consider that investigating each of them has to be within its social and cultural contexts.

To sum up, the Arts and Crafts Movement appeared to investigate fundamental issues (e.g. fighting machines predominance, preserving craftsman skills, honesty in use of materials, protecting the craftsman's status etc). These issues for crafts are still also investigated locally in Oman, especially in the Public Authority of Crafts Industries. Similar to the Art and Crafts Movement, the PACI fights for traditional crafts and protecting craftsman's status in both the enterprise and society. Also, the PACI stands against ugliness, mass production and machine domination.

The Bauhaus:

The challenges of Omani crafts cultural enterprises, regarding training in craftsmanship (including professionalism and specialization), and investigating the craftsperson's social status (in comparison with artists) are considered to be the most important issues which are relevant to the Bauhaus. So, it was important to invoke the Bauhaus movement's artistic and technical perspectives as will be shown in this part.

Beside the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Bauhaus was considered as another movement which was established to give crafts a high position alongside all other creative industries. As demonstrated in previous discussions, the Arts and Crafts Movement's most notable rejection in their firms was not using machines due to their negative impact on craftsmen. In fact this rejection was to change with the Bauhaus in the beginning of the 20th century (Scheidig. W, 1967, p.9).

In the Bauhaus declaration of 1919, Walter Gropius asserted that the major goal of the new enterprise was in making a combination of art, design, craft, sculpture and architecture "into a single creative expression" (Winton. A, 2007). In fact, crafts dominated the Bauhaus' main activities where students were required to attend pottery, metalwork, weaving and typography more than fine art classes (ibid). In her book *'Bauhaus Culture: from Weimar to the Cold War'*, Kathleen James (2006) stressed that the Bauhaus contributed in elevating craftsmen and put them in a distinguished position among artists when Gropius gathered art masters with craftsmen to give artists some technical experience (p. XV). Furthermore, Gropius' first aim, basically was to unify "the arts through crafts" (Winton. A, 2007), so it seemed that crafts took the centre position in the process. But in 1923 the goal took another direction, when the Bauhaus stressed "the importance of designing for mass production" and adopting the slogan's "Art into Industry" paradigm (Winton. A, 2007). But we still understand that in the Bauhaus, it was the first time to witness the attachment of craft objects to concept, style and modernity (Naylor.G, 1980). The above history shows how policies changed within a single enterprise (Weimar School), and this can communicate a message to enterprises and training centres (including the PACI) that there is no constant strategy or policy that is supposed to be used at all times. Mass production of art and craft as a strategy in the Bauhaus, for example, was rejected in the beginning of the movement, but it became necessary later, as asserted by Winton.

Crafts After the Post-war Period:

Crafts in general and crafts enterprises witnessed different themes, forms, theories, perspectives and knowledge after the post-war period. Tanya Harrod (1999), in her book *'The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century'*, described the main improvements of this period's crafts, when she said that this stage had a new audience, new practitioners, new patronage, and shifted from private to public (p.244). Technically, she believed that this period also witnessed creative reaction in opposition to inter-war crafts "traditions", especially in terms of using new materials for the first time in craftsmanship, such as polystyrene and aluminum (ibid, p.254).

The table (1) below shows the aforementioned crafts movements and their shared arguments/developments with the PACI and Omani crafts:

The share features and arguments between crafts movements and the Omani crafts		
Art and Crafts Movement	The Bauhaus	Post- War
Mass production	Craftsman in factories and manufacturing firms	Creativity instead of traditions because of new materials
Capitalism	Craftsman similar to artist in the society	Completed merging between crafts and art (e.g. Picasso)
Machines domination	Art and craft in one firm	Governmental financial support
Protecting craftsman status	Developing crafts schools and training enterprises in very organised forms	Computer design influence (CAD)
Ugliness (in production)		Small Enterprises (SE)
		Consumerism

Table (1) showed aforementioned crafts movements and their shared arguments with the PACI and Omani crafts.

The table (1) summarised the chronology of crafts in general and crafts enterprises historical changes, in particular in the Art and Crafts Movement, the Bauhaus and Post- War period. Regardless of the time of any of these movements, some of the challenges which faced the Art and Craft Movement, more than a century ago, are still investigated in Omani crafts enterprises today. To illustrate, the arguments about ‘mass production’, ‘machines domination’, ‘capitalism’ (seeking profits) and ‘ugliness’ as the result of machines prototyping, can be found today in crafts enterprises (PACI) in Oman. Also the table shows the Bauhaus additions to crafts enterprises, such as elevating craftspeople’s status, when they combined fine art with crafts, by gathering artists and craftsmen in one enterprise, developing organised training programs, and transferring the individual craftsman workshops to factories.

The Bauhaus additions are directly relevant today in Omani crafts enterprises, through the challenges of training, developing skills and designs, and the status of the craftsman compared with artists, as will be shown in Omani crafts, artistic and technical challenges. Some teaching methods used in the Bauhaus schools and training centres (e.g. studying materials, drawing basic skills etc) are imitated by the PACI in its crafts centres on one hand, and also the design department at the headquarters of the PACI. The training environment (e.g. dividing time between classes and workshops, inviting artists to present their experiences, etc) became other examples that showed mutual methods between the Bauhaus and the more recent training centres of the PACI. The table also, presented the Post-War era’s developments especially consumerism, new materials used in crafts industries, and design creativity. This era’s developments and associated arguments for these developments will investigated through studying Omani crafts artistic, marketing and consumption

challenges where the challenges relating to the demand for crafts', materials matters, and the PACI designer will be investigated in depth through the research. In other words, all these movements and their developments will be considered as a mirror image for the Omani crafts enterprise investigation in this research.

Field Data : Traditional and Developed Crafts in Oman:

Studying the development of traditional art and crafts within one community, was a subject investigated through social and anthropological studies, such as Robert Layton's (1994) study '*Traditional and Contemporary Art of Aboriginal*' which explored Australian traditional and contemporary art and crafts. Creating traditional or developed crafts, became an essential matter in the PACI crafts enterprises. In the Design Department, in the PACI, this issue is still unresolved as designers are divided, between supporters and non-supporters, of developing Omani crafts designs and their traditional themes (PACI, 2010). Abigail S. McGowan (2005) provided a deep study on how colonial India's craftspeople faced westernisation of their traditional crafts between 1851 and 1903, in her article, '*All that is Rare, Characteristic or Beautiful*', in this study the author demonstrated the possibility of gathering together traditional and contemporary designs and ornaments. (pp.263-284). The author, for example, indicated that silver craftsmen in 1900, in Bombay, could make progress through mixing contemporary designs that came from Great Britain with Indian traditional ornaments when he said that "As those artisans began working side by side, they developed a hybrid style, combining European forms with decorative patterns amalgamated from Kutch, Bangalore, Burma, Srinagar and elsewhere" (p.271).

It is very significant to start this part with a quote from Neil Richardson and Marcia Dorr; "In many cases Omani crafts have remained essentially unchanged in form, process and decorative detail for centuries, if not millennia" (p.8). The authors used some examples to assert this perspective, such as the large storage jar found in the Yanqul site (north of Oman) dated to the Iron Age, which is similar to a large jar produced in Bahla (north of Oman) today, an item which continues to be used today (ibid). Their justification for unchanging crafts (forms and decorative patterns) is that Omani craftsmen's skills are passed down, from parents to their children, and the children have to preserve their parents' qualities and techniques (ibid, p.27). Neil Richardson and Marcia Dorr's justification made "skills" (professionalism) the main reason for the undeveloped form's and designs of Omani crafts, but this is not acceptable for many reasons. First, the skills pertaining to some crafts, are similar between craftsmen from different territories in Oman, also craftsmen from all over the world have similar skills (the throwing wheel technique of potters is still used today by craftsmen, but their products are very different from each other and fully developed). Second, if skills are responsible for the underdevelopment of Omani crafts, why did they (craftsmen) not use their skills, to put into practice developed forms and designs created by independent designers?

However, all the previously mentioned arguments suffer from some serious weaknesses. First, even when the authors mentioned, that in some cases Omani crafts have remained essentially unchanged for millennia, they concentrated in investigating traditional Omani crafts, but they did not explore the developed cases of Omani crafts. Second, Richardson and Dorr's project of documenting Omani crafts was published in 2003, before the establishment of the PACI, so all their arguments about developing Omani crafts came as personal suggestions from the authors, at a time when all the PACI research papers, conferences and recommendations, regarding developing crafts had not yet occurred (PACI, 2005). Third, the descriptive theme of Richardson and Dorr's book, did not contribute to investigating the issue of developing

crafts to satisfy consumers' demands, and according to the PACI, consumerism is considered as main factor to be accounted for in order to investigate developing crafts.

The experimental data from the industrial field of craft and art education teachers' experiments are rather controversial, and there is no general agreement about the way to develop Omani traditional crafts. In this research, more than 40 art education teachers worked in the SQU ceramic workshop to develop Omani traditional pottery within 4 months. In the end of the working period they presented a piece of paper associated with their art works (ceramic pieces) explaining their ideas and suggestions to develop pottery industry in Oman. Also, each art work was evaluated by another teacher by using a special rubric sheet prepared by the researcher. The images (1 & 2) below showed two examples (out of forty) of participants' contributions in this research:



Crafts' Design in Crafts Enterprise:

As established in data part, participated art education teachers views and arguments, secondary data and collected statistics supported 'developing' Omani crafts and pottery rather than imitating traditional styles, and they considered that developing crafts and pottery will not succeed without developing craftsmen's and potters' contemporary skills, and improving the design unit (Department of Design), at the PACI aiming towards achieving the goal of modernising Omani crafts and pottery designs and themes.

Investigating 'applying multi-themes' (developed and traditional) in craft making as creative industries, led to discussing 'craft design' in particular, which is different to other design areas. The theorist J. Christopher Johns, classified crafts designs as the lowest type of designs, among other design fields, such as architecture and graphic design (McGee, 1999). He claimed that crafts do not need design and craftsmen usually make objects by trial and error and they usually do not use drawings and sketches before making their objects (ibid). Moreover, he thought that in craft areas, there is no separation of designer from maker, and craftsmen must use the cheapest possible materials to reduce costs as a result of the usual errors and inaccuracies (ibid). In a contemporary contribution, Maurice Barnwell (2011), in his book *Design Creativity and Culture*, partly supported J. Christopher Johns view, when he presented an example under the subtitle "*At Home in a Hot Climate*", which showed that Bedouin (man of the tent) in Arabian desert black tent constructs made from animals' hair were "responding to a different set of cultural controls" as a result of unselfconscious designs, made by tribal men in this area of the world (pp.24-25). Crafts' traditional forms

(design) in the past, rest on the same nomadic mentalities that unconsciously craftsmen build their crafts production, following their own environment's needs. In fact, as Maurice Barnwell mentioned:

“do not assume that the unselfconscious design process means old, outdated or inefficient. The design process is a natural activity of all humankind” (p.25). If truth be told, Maurice Barnwell asserted that “tradition is the enemy of progress” and “progress is the enemy of tradition” (ibid). Indeed, their claims about crafts designs were rejected by David McGee (1999) in his distinguished article *'From Craftsmanship to Draftsmanship'* (p.3), where McGee argued that according to J. Christopher, all complicated crafts objects such as wooden ships will not be considered as crafts because they were made with fully drawn and sketched designs. Even given that Johns' description of a crafts' designer was very old, according to the researcher's field data collection, many of his thoughts about crafts' design still exist in Omani crafts enterprises (including the PACI).

The challenge of 'developing traditional crafts' to meet consumers' demands in Oman required a concrete solution, and according to all aforementioned discussions and data discovered from the field, the solution can only occur by appointing a group of designers to achieve this goal, as an alternative of giving this design mission to not fully qualified and academically prepared designers. It is expected that the designers must be prepared to create 3D designs and to have full experience in the types of raw materials used in Omani crafts in the PACI centres. According to the collected data (Part5), Omani designers who worked in the Department of Design at the PACI have a 'lack of specialisation' in designing, while the majority of them have a general education or graphic design backgrounds only.

Choosing 'appointing professional designers' as a concrete solution will play a role in crafts enterprises (PACI centres), more than individual crafts projects, because those final crafts products in enterprises are usually evaluated in terms of success or failure in the marketing stages, and in contrast individual craftsmen, have less concern about marketing. Professional designers in crafts enterprises must be connected with craftsmen in the field, rather than staying in the authority offices, but the interviews showed that designers' interaction with crafts workshops and craftspeople was very low. Because 'appointing professional designers' has been suggested as a solution towards creating developed traditional crafts, it is very important to define the 'professional designer within traditional craft enterprise' and the definition itself should be clearly understandable in order to be used easily in the authority's enterprises.

The designer should be qualified to design tangible objects (3D), have complete knowledge of raw materials of produced crafts objects, have absolute understanding of the nation's cultural identity and heritage so as to be used as tools to develop traditional crafts, and finally have good understanding of marketing and the consumer mechanisms. To define a 'qualified designer' in craft enterprise, it is very important to refer to the Victor Margolin (2002) study *'The Designer as Producer'*, when he identifies the characteristics of 'designer/entrepreneurs' in crafts enterprises. Victor Margolin stated that “Today, designer/entrepreneurs can do more than challenge the system of industrial production; they can establish their own niches in it.

In *Bahla Pottery and Ceramics Training and Producing Centre (BPCTPC)* production is divided between traditional and developed designs, as shown in the PACI publications and field data collection (visits and interviews). According to the supervisor of the centre, it

stopped making some types of traditional pots because of lower demand. And according to the centre's glaze maker (from the Philippines), Omani pottery needs radical development in decoration and firing techniques. Both claims show that pottery designs became the main issue in terms of developing this type of crafts. Furthermore, designs of developed pots came from the Department of Design (PACI), and according to the researcher's notes, models of production and published photographs, they only develop a few forms of Omani traditional pottery and there was less development in pot surface decoration.

As mentioned before, the Department of Design in the authority's headquarters is responsible for designing all the developed crafts in the PACI and that means there is no concentration on any type of product, including pottery. According to collected data, especially from (BPCTPC), this department's designers were not prepared enough to design ceramic and pottery objects, as they have no intensive experience in mould making, firing techniques, developing glaze recipes, clay types and temperature ranking, knowledge about availability of materials in Oman (clays, glaze natural materials) and even basic 3D design skills. This in fact asserted Victor Margolin's definition of 'designer/entrepreneurs' when he mentioned that the designer has to be in direct contact with craftspeople, materials, and have all the making skills that can help him/her to imagine final products and outcomes (2002). The designers lack of field experience in making pottery and ceramics' glazes, for example, will make it hard for him to design pottery and ceramics pots with special affects and surface decorations, such as crystalline, salt and raku glazes and slips.

Designers also face another challenge, which is not only are they unprepared for the aforementioned skills, but they also lack the ability of interpreting the heritage and cultural themes to transfer them to pottery production (colours, glaze textures, modifying pots' functionality, interring Arabian calligraphy, focusing on showing pottery in open spaces, contribution of pottery in architectural purposes etc.). As explained in the literature the importance of using cultural and heritage themes, ornaments and textures in making crafts in general and pottery in particular in Oman, was asserted by Richardson and Dorr (2003), in a complete part in their documentation study '*The Crafts Heritage of Oman*' (pp.32-56). In that part of their study, they connected the uniqueness of Omani crafts (including pottery) with special elements of designs, patterns of construction, Islamic ornaments, colours and tones related to Omani landscapes, geometric and symmetry forms, manipulation of texture, calligraphy using energetic letters forms, complex patterns of geometric motifs and interlocking circles (Richardson and Dorr ,2003, pp. 32-56). Abigail S. McGowan (2005) stressed on the importance of each society's cultural, social and heritage uniqueness to be invested through crafts industry, in her work '*All that is Rare, Characteristic or Beautiful*', and she claimed that the uniqueness of a society's traditional characteristics, is a central factor to developing the traditional crafts industry. In order to identify Indian crafts design special characteristics, among other societies unique design values, she stated that "critics identified colour harmony and judicious use of ornament as the distinctive contributions of Indian design, offering the most important lessons to British industry" (p.268).

Investment of cultural, heritage and artistic characteristics of any society in the crafts industry, in reality, can help to safeguard the intangible heritage of skills and knowledge of *Traditional Craftsmanship*, as was recommended by UNESCO. For instance, a project nominated in 2009, and accepted in the UNESCO intangible heritage list, traditional design and practices for building Chinese wooden arch bridges in Fujian Province, and the south-western part of Zhejiang Province in China in 2009 (UNESCO, 2009) can be used as a complete example to reflect the importance of gathering together 'specialisation in design',

‘involvement of unique handwork (craftsmanship) techniques’, ‘involvement of intangible heritage and cultural elements’, and the ‘importance of intervention of new technologies’ in a crafted masterpiece.

Furthermore, the PACI designers showed less understanding of pottery and ceramic marketing and consumption issues locally (purpose and functionality of pots today, weight of pots for tourists, home internal decoration styles etc.) which will be discussed in depth in the marketing and consumption part in this chapter. The diagram (2) showed craft enterprise designer’s qualities:

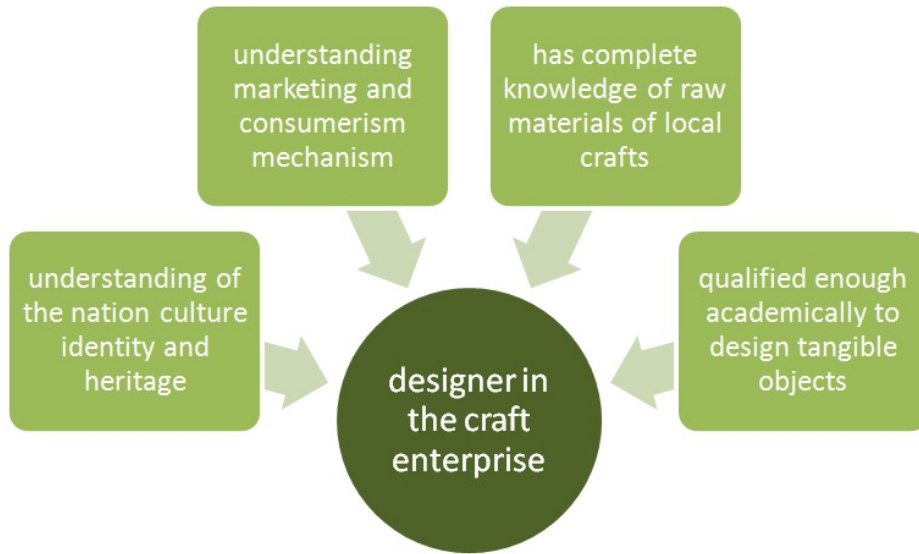


Diagram (2) craft enterprise designer’s qualities

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