

Explaining the Approach and Process of Co-creation in Indigenous Handicrafts

Hossein Norouzi Ghara Gheshlagh

Assistant Professor, Handicrafts Department, Arak University, Arak, Iran. (Corresponding Author)/
h-norouzi@araku.ac.ir

Somaye Salehi

Instructor, Carpet Department, Arak University, Arak, Iran/ s-salehi@araku.ac.ir

Received: 06/23/2023

Accepted: 24/09/2023

Introduction

The creation of indigenous handicrafts by using raw materials from the surrounding environment firstly aims not only at producing a product to meet the needs but also at forming a basis for income generation. The process of industrialization and the emergence of new raw materials in the present era has greatly reduced the demand for indigenous handicrafts. It seems necessary to examine the knowledge, skills, and capacities of indigenous handicrafts in connection with other scientific fields. Today, co-creation has been proposed as a collaborative method in solving problems. Based on this, the current research has been conducted with the aim of identifying and explaining the co-creation approach in this field, with special reference to the model of Sanders and Stappers. In other words, in the present study the co-creation method proposed by Sanders and Steppers for indigenous designers and artisans will be investigated and described operationally, and its capabilities in empowering indigenous handicraft artisans will be determined.

Research Method

The current research used a qualitative and descriptive-phenomenological method. Data collection was based on the library method. Analysis and description are the most important steps in descriptive phenomenology. In the analysis, the identification of the essence of the phenomenon is investigated; that is, the basic elements of the phenomenon are classified, and the relationships among them are described. At the analysis stage, the identification and understanding of the phenomenon of co-creation in handicrafts was carried out according to Sanders and Stappers's model as well as other researcher's ideas. In the description section, by emphasizing the experience of the authors, the pattern of co-creation was compared with the conditions required in indigenous handicrafts. At this stage, the phenomenon of co-creation in handicrafts was staged, and its operational steps were described. In other words, a crude description of the phenomenon was avoided and the stages of the mentioned model were explained in depth and with an operational approach.

Research Findings

The results showed that co-creation in handicraft works as a learning mechanism which enabled artisans and designers to acquire knowledge and skills based on a shared experience. In the description of the mentioned model, the cooperation of both groups begins in the preliminary stage with 'fuzzy front end' and before the beginning of the designing process. This term refers to the invisible, ambiguous, and chaotic nature of this stage. In this step, all participants should work together to define a clear design strategy and ideas for developing the collaborative

process. When designers came to co-create and develop a product in a certain region and style, several stages could be considered for them: familiarization with the local environment, with handicraft techniques and products, and with native materials. During the vague fuzzy front end, the required knowledge was mostly transferred in the master/apprentice mode.

After the fuzzy front end, the 'design development process' follows, in which the design criteria and everything obtained in the previous section lead to ideas, concepts, prototypes, and, then, modified products. What needs to be done in the design development stage is the development process based on a product design and a development approach. One of the most common design approaches, which are generally used, is the four-stage of: design, discussion, prototyping, and presentation.

In the design development process, there may be a gap between manufacturers and designers in terms of responsiveness to the idea of creating new products. It is possible that the artisans are stuck in their traditional skills, and the designers do not have enough knowledge related to that art. Therefore, in the design development process, the repeated stages of drawing, discussion, and sampling help fill this gap. After completing the first stage and repeating it again, manufacturers and designers became increasingly involved in the co-creation process. By passing this stage, the relationship between artisans, designers, and stakeholders is established and strengthened. The experiences and feedback obtained from this stage led to the beginning of the second stage and the gradual modification of the effect; finally, the production of a complete and practical sample is obtained by repeating the previous four stages. The joint prototyping process enables the industrialists to understand the production methods and design materials; the designers also gained a better understanding of the local industry and of the way to combine modernization with it.

Conclusion

This research is based on the description of a practical theory in the development of indigenous handicraft products and also the investigation of the possibilities of handicraft production as a contemporary economic activity. In this study, a co-creation process has been proposed for redesigning indigenous handicrafts. One of the most important results of this cooperation is the creation and the transfer of knowledge among handicrafts makers, designers and other related industries. The experiential learning and knowledge gained through cooperation form an important element in the professional development of the activists in this field. Students and craft designers in this field can act as change agents. These people can help local handicrafts by using their knowledge to create innovative business plans. This cooperation is a learning experience for both groups of people. In addition to the usefulness of this event for local artisans, the integration and application of indigenous handicrafts in the academic activities of the students of this field, due to its implementing and operational nature, effectively enriches their knowledge of unfamiliar fields. The results obtained from this survey can be used to inspire the artisans and designers to develop the indigenous handicrafts of Iran. In general, the process of co-creation by combining distinct local characteristics and novel ideas gives a new life to local art products. Based on this, and according to what has been achieved, it is suggested that the presented co-creation model should be used for the cooperation of designers and manufacturers in order to promote and facilitate the production of local handicrafts in many regions of Iran. Furthermore, by using this method, the students of handicrafts can experience the process of production and development of indigenous handicrafts in practice and enrich their knowledge.

Keywords: co-creation, handicrafts, designer, artisan, development.