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Traditional Craftsmanship as Intangible Cultural Heritage and an Economic Factor in Austria

Summary

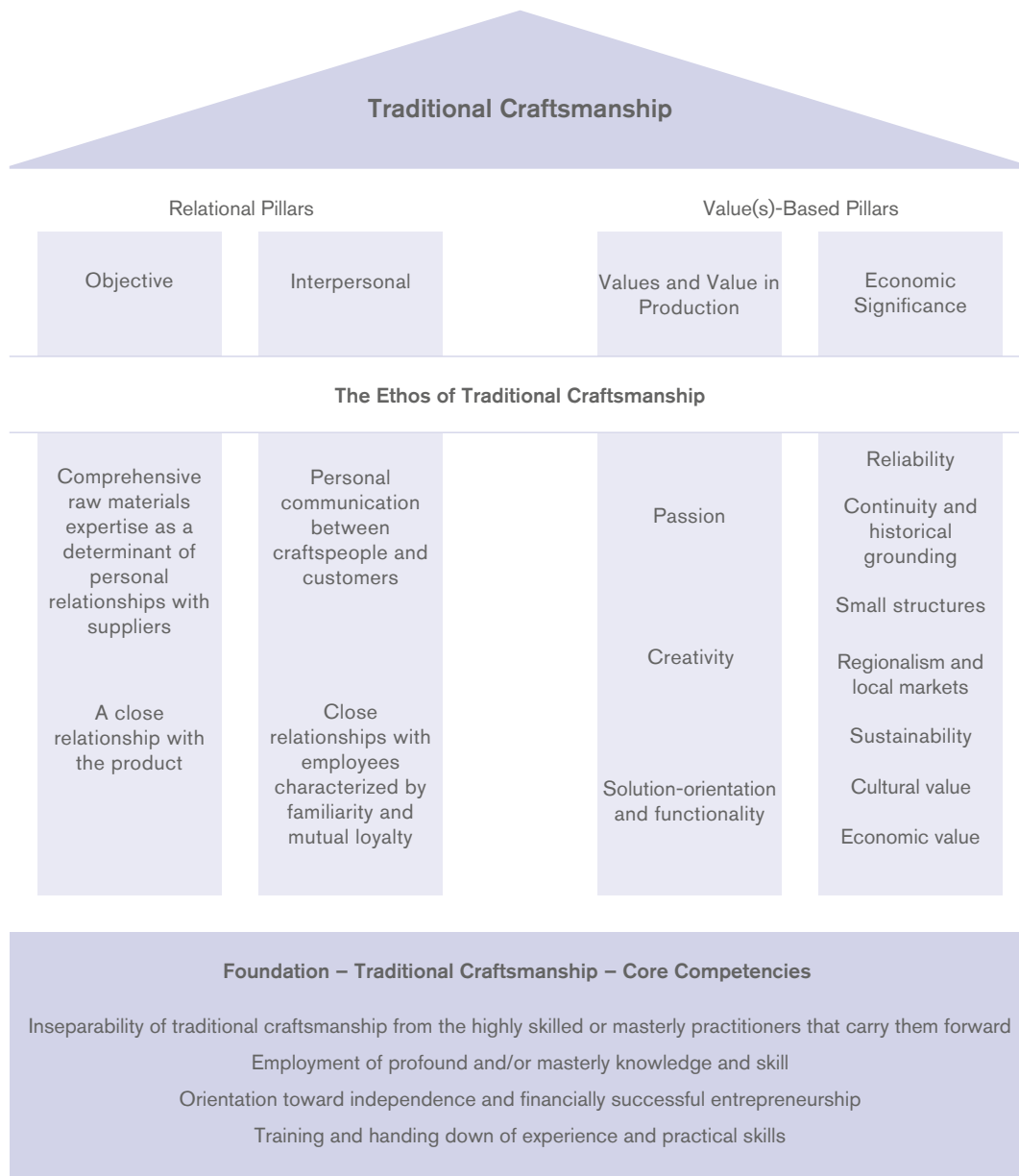
Traditional craftsmanship in Austria, if it is to survive, is in need of a new self-understanding and increased public awareness of its value to society. Entire occupational fields are threatened with extinction along with their associated bodies of knowledge and skills, and it is high time that these negative tendencies be countered—not only as a sustainable answer to global mass-market production and excessive consumption, but also in the interest of providing future generations with training and career opportunities that are both sensible and promising.

The present study surveys the state of traditional craftsmanship in Austria for the first time. On the basis of both qualitative and quantitative data, it seeks to define and analyse the parameters within which traditional craftsmanship exists, as well as traditional craftsmanship's relative degrees of endangerment and future importance in terms of cultural policy and the economy. This study thus represents an essential step towards creation of an esteeming perception of traditional craftsmanship both as cultural heritage and as an economic factor.

Summary

The answers to the research questions can be summarized as follows:

I. What is understood by the term “traditional craftsmanship”, and/or what specific criteria must “traditional craftsmanship” fulfil in order to qualify as such?



Graphic 3: Descriptive Model of the Characteristics of Traditional Craftsmanship

This graphic defines the fundamental values and contents of “traditional craftsmanship” and represents the relationships and interplay between them by visualising a foundation plus relevant relational and value(s)-based pillars in a way that is clear and easily comprehended.

The parameters that form this graphic’s “foundation” are in constant interplay with the elements that make up traditional craftsmanship’s relational and value(s)-based pillars. These elements, in turn, are closely interrelated via mechanisms of causes and effects.

In order to ensure traditional craftsmanship’s medium- to long-term survival, it is necessary that all four of the parameters comprising the foundation be fulfilled. If even one of these parameters goes missing, it is no longer possible to speak of traditional craftsmanship in the strict sense. The essential defining parameters of traditional craftsmanship included in the foundation therefore represent indispensable core competencies, competencies without which traditional craftsmanship cannot successfully sustain itself and continue to develop.

In contrast to the essential elements listed in the foundation, the degree to which the elements of the relational and value(s)-based pillars are necessary—and/or of the degree to which they are manifested—is flexible. This flexibility is due to the heterogeneous nature of the various fields of traditional craftsmanship, with their differing outputs and/or services. In addition to production, these also encompass installation, maintenance and care of, and repairs to products combined with service-related components, all of which is frequently rather specialised and/or customised.

Therefore: not every single element of the relational and value(s)-based pillars need necessarily be present in order to speak of traditional craftsmanship. But on the other hand: the less pronounced the characteristics from the relational and value(s)-based pillars at a business are, the less present practically applied, intangible traditional craftsmanship values are at that business.

In order to qualify as traditional craftsmanship, the four core competencies of the foundation should be joined by at least one essential defining parameter from each of the relational and value(s)-based pillars that is included in the values brought to bear in a business’s strategic and operative orientation.

II. What forms of traditional craftsmanship exist in Austria, and to what extent are they threatened in their respective existences?

Traditional craftsmanship in Austria is characterised by liveliness and dynamism, with an eye to possible change up ahead as well as to the transformations and changes that have taken place over the various fields’ histories—which typically go back several centuries.

Over the observation period of the present study (1950–2015), craftsmanship occupations have undergone constant change. There have been cases of repositioning via specialisation, discovery of economic niches, and link-ups with other occupations. And several occupations that were crowded out of the market and consequently went extinct can now be experienced only in a museum-context.

In 1954, Austria’s longstanding system of dual education provided the opportunity to enrol in systematic vocational training for 249 traditional skilled crafts and trades plus 63 craftsmanship skills that were passed on informally (see point 4.3).

At present, however, there exist just 180 such professions that are passed on via systematic formal training. In some categories of trades and skilled crafts, professional training modules are offered that combine multiple earlier job descriptions either in their entirety or in part. The individual traditional trades and skilled crafts and their development over six decades are detailed under point 4.2.1.

On the basis of this study’s clustering of trades and skilled crafts as well as its evaluation of six decades of apprentice statistics for the individual trades, various developments can be observed. Since 1954, trades in the thematic group “Textiles, Fashion, and Leather” have been subject to pronounced shrinkage. The thematic trade groups of “Paper, Photo, and Printing”, “Art and Music”, “Foodstuffs and Luxury Products”, and “Wood, Clay, Glass, and Natural Minerals” logged an increase in apprentices prior to 1980, but over the entire comparison period of 1954 to 2014, a clear overall reduction in the number of apprentices can still be made out.

The occupations from the groups “Construction, Home, and Garden” and “Metal Technology and Machine Building” also suffered slight overall decreases during the 1954–2014 period, though these groups contain numerous outliers that exhibited either rising numbers of apprentices or severe overall decreases in the number of people learning these trades.

Only the three trade groups of “Health and Body Care”, “Electrical Technology and Electronics”, and “Chemistry and Synthetics” had more apprentices in 2014 than they did in 1954.

In terms of methodology, general findings on the individual thematic groups of trades in relation to “traditional craftsmanship” were the product of for the most part qualitative research and analysis (see “Studiendesign” [Study Design] in the full study). Graphic 3 (Descriptive Model of the Characteristics of Traditional Craftsmanship, p. 27) renders this clearly visible. And this graphic’s characteristics and parameters typifying traditional craftsmanship represent the criteria in terms of which their respective endangerment is evaluated.

Trade professions’ decreasing attractiveness and low social status, especially among young people, combined with the constantly decreasing opportunities to earn money and achieve success enjoyed by those who practice traditional craftsmanship on an entrepreneurial basis, are major reasons behind traditional craftsmanship’s endangerment (see “Gefährdungsmatrix” [Endangerment Matrix], Table 12, p. 93).

Due to the heterogeneity and diversity of occupations involving traditional craftsmanship, including within the groups defined in the present study, the situation and degree of endangerment of individual trades and/or skilled crafts can only be portrayed upon detailed examination of the individual defined areas (see also p. 16 and p. 31 of the full study). In order to understand the development of individual occupations, deeper research into said occupations is always required (see p. 31)—which, however, would far exceed the scope of the present basic study.

III. How is knowledge of traditional craftsmanship handed down from one generation to the next?

For traditional trades and traditional skilled crafts in Austria, the following systems of training can be described:

System 1 stands for traditional trades, the practice of which typically requires certain knowledge and skills that are imparted via an official course of fundamental training. Specific skills are passed on either directly as part of apprenticeships at businesses certified to do so in combination with coursework at a vocational school (i.e., the dual education system) or in full-time professional schools and/or intermediate- and upper-level secondary schools with practical vocational orientations.

System 2 stands for traditional skilled crafts that are practiced on the basis of specific knowledge and skills that are acquired freely and without any regulated systems of training.

The systematic and dynamic further development of practical skills in traditional craftsmanship is a significant prerequisite for its continued survival. Should the systematic transfer of knowledge in a specific trade or skilled craft go missing, loss of the entire occupation becomes a medium-term threat, since the entire body of practical experiential knowledge will be lost over the course of time.

IV. Which forms of traditional craftsmanship are of cultural, socio-political, and economic relevance to the present and to the future?

On the basis of their role in the economy, businesses practicing traditional trades and skilled crafts perform a multitude of functions that are sustainable, economic, social, and cultural in nature. Businesses practicing traditional trades and skilled crafts make contributions relating to:

- jobs and apprentice positions in their respective regions,
- supplying the local and regional populace with goods and services,
- the availability of products and services that convey a regional and/or national culture and identity,
- social commitment on location and in their surroundings,
- regional anchoring and networking,
- regional value-added chains,
- tax revenues on the municipal, state, and national levels, and
- crisis-resistance and autonomy.

Altogether, Austria is home to 151,558 active trade group members (source: 2015 WKO annual statistics for the sector “Trades and Crafts”, active trade group memberships by trade group), businesses which represent the traditional craftsmanship occupations in the present study (see section 4.2 in source).

Each year, these businesses train half of all apprentices. Proportionally, 55.6% of all training business are ones that work in trades and skilled crafts (see Dornmayr et al., 2014, p. 17 ff. and p. 30). Hence, it is above all such businesses that offer many youth the opportunity to gain a foothold in the labour market, including those for whom higher schooling or higher education is not an option.

Every third Austrian business with employees is an enterprise that provides craftsmanship services as defined in the present study. Expressed in concrete figures: among 147,539 active members of the guilds grouped under the industry sector "Crafts and Trades" that are also employing businesses, 47,643 practice trades and skilled crafts that can be characterised as traditional craftsmanship (source: WKO, employees in 2015 according to sector and trade group).

Of altogether 2,264,934 employees in businesses represented by the WKO, 537,418 individuals are employed by businesses that can be categorised as involved in traditional trades and skilled crafts (source: WKO, employees in 2015 according to sector and trade group).

V. What need is there for action on the part of political and business circles to strengthen traditional craftsmanship?

The study makes clear that the poor image of "traditional craftsmanship" as well as a number of structural impediments in recent decades (see above all 4.6) have occasioned a decrease in attractiveness and, consequently, a decline of "traditional craftsmanship".

In the interest of strengthening and encouraging "traditional craftsmanship", the present research findings would suggest consideration of the following measures:

- Measures to positively influence the image of and esteem for traditional craftsmanship in society, thus enhancing the attractiveness and social status of traditional trades and skilled crafts;
 - Public presentation of individual entrepreneurially active craftspeople as testimonials to the inseparability of traditional craftsmanship and entrepreneurial personalities
 - Public featuring of the winners of craftsmanship awards and competitions in a way similar to how successful athletes are marketed via the media
 - Promotion of the esteem accorded to independent entrepreneurialism in craftsmanship-related areas at schools and universities
 - Improvement of the image of craftsmanship-related occupations among youth
- Measures to improve the competitiveness of businesses practicing traditional trades and skilled crafts, thus contributing to sustainable economic success and higher potential income;
 - Reduction of the tax burden, in particular of overall employer costs
 - Tax advantages for providers of craftsmanship-related goods and services
 - Support for investments by businesses
 - Reasonable levels of bureaucracy

- Measures to improve the specialized qualifications of entrepreneurs and employees via the incentivisation of training and continuing education.
 - Improvement of the incentives for businesses to take on apprentices
 - Consistent adaptation of occupational definitions and curricula to prevailing reality in the relevant industries
 - Improvements to the quality of vocational schools
 - Enhancement of the attractiveness of the dual system of vocational education
 - Strengthening of entrepreneurs' managerial skills
 - Improvement of the specialised qualifications of entrepreneurs and their employees
 - Establishment and development of networks that serve traditional craftsmanship

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