GLOBALISING LOCAL CRAFT
-enhancing collaboration between Indian rural artisans and Swedish IKEA designers
ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to further enable emancipation of Indian craftswomen through the use of an alternative co-design process.

As a designer working with textiles and fashion I was interested to explore how I could positively impact the production process of textiles. I spent five weeks in India, with the intent to understand the stakeholders and the project, but mainly focused on the Indian craftswomen’s involvement.

The design research has been an iterative process based on qualitative research consisting of interactive partner visits, observations, conversations and workshops.

Starting in 2012, IKEA have formed partnerships with social entrepreneurs around the world with the aim to create social change rather than economic wealth, mainly focusing on giving employment to women. In this partnership, IKEA haven’t yet found the ultimate level of artisan’s involvement in the design process that is convenient for both parties.

I propose a design process, comprised of tools, that aims to support rural artisans and urban designers when co-creating textile products aimed at a western market.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness, Design, Social Entrepreneurs, Textiles, India, Co-creation, Craft, Confidence, Equality.

WHEN A WOMAN STARTS TO EARN, THE FAMILY RESPECTS HER AND SHE GETS MORE OF A SAY IN THE DECISIONS BEING MADE.

— Dipti Singh, program manager Rangsutra Varanasi
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MORE THAN ONE TIME HAVE I HEARD THAT INDIA IS THE LAND OF A THOUSAND TRUTHS, AND OUT OF EXPERIENCE I CAN ONLY AGREE.
INTRODUCTION

THE SLOGAN WE USE FOR THE INITIATIVE IS 'HAND MADE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE'.

― Ann-Sofie Gunnarsson, Head of communication IKEA 'Social Entrepreneurs Initiative'.

In this chapter, you'll be introduced to how it can be if you are a woman in India today. I will introduce myself, as well as the “Social Entrepreneurs Initiative” founded by IKEA.

As a woman in India today you might not work because your family doesn’t allow you to leave the house – you’re supposed to cook, clean, take care of the kids and serve your parent-in-laws. Or maybe the family is so rich that you can spend your time going shopping, traveling or meeting your female equivalents while employees do the household work and take care of your kids. Maybe you’re from a progressive middle class family who have let you move from home to study and encourage you to prioritise a career before getting married. You might also have an education and a good job, but suddenly have to give them up in order to get married and take care of a family.

Maybe all you hope is that your parents will find you a good husband, or you have moved from home to live in Mumbai with an auntie - but the truth is you live with your secret boyfriend. Or you are just like Papu, who grew up in a house made of mud in a rural village in Rajasthan, got married, gave birth to two kids and then started to work as an embroidery artisan. After a few years, she advanced to be a sample maker and the family moved to the city – all without facing any family problems, as long as she takes care of the house and the kids.

Born in Sweden, I have grown up with the mindset that anything I want to do is possible – I just need to work hard to achieve it. My parents have not raised me any different to my brothers and they have never said I can’t actualise any of the ideas I have had. My mum told me as a kid that the world is unfair and that there are situations where it might be a disadvantage to be female. Hearing that only triggered me more to prove my capability.

From a young age, I dreamed about a global career working with women’s rights – a dream that later changed into becoming a fashion designer. I left my hometown to completely dedicate myself to these new studies. I trained my skills in pattern cutting, tailoring, did a BA in Fashion Design and launched my own clothing label. I moved to Stockholm to set up a studio together with two friends, freelanced within costume design, discontinued my label and moved on to freelance for big clothing companies. I was not happy and fulfilled – something was missing. I felt disconnected to the actual making of clothes and the hand feel of my computers keyboard could not replace textures in different materials. There was a sense of hopelessness – what I was doing didn’t seem to make any positive difference for anyone else, as far as I was concerned.

I applied for an MFA at Konstfack with the aim to take action against the structures and routines in my profession that I disagreed with. I needed a platform to explore how I, as a designer, could make a positive contribution to someone or something in the world.

During a preparatory trip to India I was introduced to Linda-Marie Björkemar at IKEA, who is project leader for ‘Social Entrepreneurs Initiative’ - SEI. With SEI, IKEA aims to create social change rather than economic wealth through forming a partnership with social entrepreneurs, mainly focusing on giving employment to women, and training them for several years. Since it’s a new project, IKEA still haven’t found the ultimate level of artisans involvement in the design process. They’ve reached a point where they felt a need to try something new, and I saw an opportunity to explore the design aspect during my degree work.

Page 5
Top: Rangsutra artisans during IKEA production.
© Inter IKEA Systems B.V. 1999 – 2017
Bottom: Me and Papu making an embroidery library together, Bikaner February 2017.
THE AIM OF THIS PROJECT IS TO FURTHER ENABLE EMANCIPATION OF INDIAN CRAFTSWOMEN THROUGH SUGGESTING AN ALTERNATIVE CO-DESIGN PROCESS.

THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT IS TO TRIAL A DESIGN PROCESS, COMPRISED OF TOOLS, THAT WILL SUPPORT BOTH RURAL ARTISANS AND DESIGNERS IN PRODUCING TEXTILE PRODUCTS FOR IKEA.
Co-creation - In this case, the collaboration between designers and artisans.

Context - When discussing context of products that refers to the end use of the product, i.e. what the home it will end up in looks like and how the people in that home use the product. This could also be accompanied by references to the culture of the home and any special events/traditions.

Cultural Awareness - The awareness of the differences between various cultures is essential when it comes to interaction between people from other cultural backgrounds. (Ahrens and Guetz, 2015)

End user - A person who buys a product at IKEA.

Qualitative research – Is an approach that aims to show complexities of a social problem or phenomenon, often based on methods such as interviews, observations, workshops or tests. It strives to give a holistic overview with an emphasis on the participants’ experience (Creswell, 2008).

SEI - 'Social Entrepreneurs Initiative' (IKEA, 2017)

Transnational Strategy - A marketing strategy used by multinational companies. The aim of this strategy is to find the right balance between standardization and local adaptation to countries specific requirements. (Ahrens and Guetz, 2015)

White person - This does not only refer to colour of skin but also to the outlook on the world one person might have due to having grown up in western society. (Ahmed, 2011)
FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY, EARNING AN INCOME OPENS UP NEW OPPORTUNITIES. WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OFTEN HAVE LITTLE OR NO ACCESS TO EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE OR PAID EMPLOYMENT. FORMING LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS WITH ‘RANGSUTRA’ AND ‘INDUSTREE PT’ GIVES WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA A CHANCE TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE AND A BETTER FUTURE.

— Vaishali Misra, Initiative Leader, IKEA of Sweden
"I PERSONALLY THINK THAT DESIGNERS COULD BENEFIT FROM BECOMING SPECIALIST IN WORKING WITH CRAFT AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES AND SPEND SOME MORE TIME WITH THE ARTISANS. BECAUSE THE CRAFT GOES HAND IN HAND WITH THE DESIGN."

— Neelam Chhiber, co-founder of Industree PT

"THERE'S NOT SO MUCH TIME TO GO IN DEPTH WITH THE PRODUCTS AND TAKE DECISIONS ON THE SPOT, EITHER FOR CO-DESIGN BETWEEN DESIGNER AND ARTISAN."

— Neelam Chhiber, co-founder of Industree PT
TO DESIGN AND PRODUCE THINGS NEEDS TO BE A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION – IT'S NEVER JUST ONE PART THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE OTHER.

— Krithika Shashi Acharya, designer Rangsutra

The Bikaner office is the biggest one and is also where the most skilled artisans work. During the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971, big communities fled from Pakistan over the border and settled down in Rajasthan and Gujarat. They brought their embroidery traditions with them and today young girls learn these from their mothers and grandmothers whilst growing up. The quality of embroidery is high in this region.

In Bikaner they also work with handloom weave - a tradition that is still being practised in many places in India but in small proportions. Just outside Bikaner, in a village called Napasar, a cluster of handloom weavers are producing Rangsutra’s fabrics. There are, on average, around 12 weavers working there now but future production with IKEA could give enough work for around 30 weavers.

The office in Varanasi isn’t as big as the one in Bikaner, where they manage all the production for the northeast regions. Neither production nor sampling happens in Varanasi, but in centres a few hours from the city. Embroidery isn’t a tradition in this area, so the women have gone from knowing nothing about the craft to becoming semi-skilled artisans. This happened due to a skills development project delivered by the UNDP and founded by IKEA Foundation.

The women who joined Rangsutra in Uttar Pradesh have learned embroidery from scratch, and it seems they have come a long way developing their new skills. This strengthens their self-confidence and also affects their home life positively, says Dipti from Rangsutra.

It’s easier for projects to get funding for female-oriented organisations, so having that focus is beneficial says Krithika. However, she believes that it’s important to include both men and women and strive towards a society where genders can work side by side. Today, we often see men who are masters when it comes to pattern cutting, sewing, tailoring and weaving. This is probably because men have always been working and, at least for a lot of women, this is a new field to work in.

But this will change. Especially now that lots of less advanced labour jobs are better paid than craft-based jobs. Men have always been raised to be confident. Krithika thinks that as a first step, many women need to be encouraged to believe in themselves too and that they can learn the crafts and become masters like the men before them. Children growing up seeing their parents as equals changes this routine. Equality between children is also necessary, as in India mothers tend to spoil their boys and expect more of their girls.

Top of page: Rangsutra artisans in Bikaner looking at mood boards of Scandinavian homes during a workshop I held.

Page 11: Examples of different kinds of Rajasthani embroidery. This is the embroidery library that Rangsutra use today to show clients.
Types of Embroideries

RANGSUTRA
Bikaner
IKEA

- Create social change rather than wealth
- Offer affordable, handmade design to many people
- Support partners to become compliant with international standards
- Utilize the artisans craft knowledge

ME

- With design as a tool, positively influence social structures
- Preservation and development of craft
- Establish and emphasise worthwhile relations during work
- Gender equality

ARTISANS

- Have consistent work to secure their salary
- Leave their house and develop their skills – only work allows them to do this
- Understand the context and end use of the product they make
- Improve their self-confidence by learning new things

STAKEHOLDERS INTEREST

END USER

- Buy attractive and handmade products at IKEA
APPROACH & POSITIONING

In the process of positioning this thesis there are a few fields that have been of great importance, some due to this project being situated in both India and Sweden. I am white. Not just in the colour of my skin, but also in the habits I have developed throughout life. I have grown up in western society (Sweden) where problems, possibilities, lifestyles and events are different to those in India (eastern society). Due to historical events, I will mention the colonial perspective, but have chosen not to emphasise it throughout the thesis.

This thesis will explore co-creation, with an emphasis on collaboration between designer and artisan. Most works seem to discuss the different co-terms with an aim to involve the end user in the design process. In some situations that might be crucial, but this project is exploring how to create a bridge between western (Swedish) designers and eastern (Indian) artisans so they can co-create products that (visually) attracts the customer (end user).

In this thesis, designer and artisan are active players whilst the customer is passive, i.e. the customer is not included in the design process, but the designer has an idea of the customers needs. A possible future scenario where the customer role changes from passive to active is mentioned in the discussion.

During the preparatory work, very few articles about a similar case were found. Berggren Torell and Knuts (2011) aim for co-production of knowledge between academia and the corporate world. The duo both have a background in ethnology with focus on textiles and craft. In their work, they talk about the importance of transferring knowledge from small-scale craft producers to students who might be the next generation of artisans. They discuss how to emphasise and preserve the local craft and they mention that these Swedish artisans often act as both designer and artisan. Berggren Torell & Knuts aim was to connect the two worlds of the academic and the corporate, whereas this thesis aims to create a third perspective between the two.

Ahrens and Guetz (2015) discuss the importance of cultural awareness, in combination with a shift from global to transnational strategy in their case study of IKEA's bed linen range in their MA thesis in 'Textile Management'. The same reasoning has proved to be important during the qualitative research in this thesis. Ahrens & Guetz study is positioned within IKEA's market context, whereas this thesis touches on similar issues but within a different context of design and sampling processes, still with IKEA in mind.

Page 14: Quote from the book "The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan." by Jenny Nordberg. Even though this story takes place in Afghanistan it addresses a common issue for women all over the world - not having the same freedom as the men around them.
"REGARDLESS OF WHO THEY ARE, WHETHER THEY ARE RICH OR POOR, EDUCATED OR ILLITERATE, AFGHAN WOMEN OFTEN DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN JUST ONE WORD: FREEDOM."

-Jenny Nordberg, The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan
This chapter summarises the theoretical preparatory work that was made to support the later qualitative research. These theories have been a source of inspiration and this thesis has similar aims and goals.

Wiesner-Hanks (2011), a professor in history with a focus on women, gender and sexuality, takes us through travel in history, highlighting the inequality between genders and pointing out how the world is slowly moving towards equality. The majority of societies in the world have always been, and still are, patriarchies. In the countries where this is slowly changing, we can also see that people have access to education, rising economic welfare and good health care (Deaton, 2013).

Inequality was the trigger for the economist Muhammad Yunus (2007) to found Grameen Bank – a bank in Bangladesh working with the poor as its primary customers. Yunus used his knowledge in economy to turn the traditional banking model on its head – for a long time, the employees didn’t sit in an office but were on tour in rural areas to be involved with their customers. The bank’s commitment to customer development and holistic thinking in terms of monetary loans is about much more than money: to involve people in a common society whilst giving women a chance to attain self-sufficiency in a traditional, patriarchal society is groundbreaking.

Eradicating poverty is not about giving things away for free, but rather about rewarding and encouraging hard work, creating savings, planning long-term goals and giving people an independent route out of poverty (Yunus, 2007).

Both Moyo (2009), an economist specialised in macroeconomics, international development and global affairs, and Yunus seem to have come to the same conclusion – that it’s crucial to create a desire in order to develop a better future, as well as profit. This cannot happen solely through monetary aid, but also requires investments of time, effort and values.

Sanders and Stappers (2008) mention that “in the future, the new co-designing languages that support and facilitate the many varieties of cross-cultural Design Techniques and Elisabeth Sanders has a background within psychology. Since the 80’s, she has been active in the field of design research with a focus on human-centered perspective and co-designing across disciplines. Although Sanders and Stappers (2008) are referenced it is not because their work is similar to this thesis, but because the fact that they mention that we in the future need to develop new ways to communicate, since co-designing will only become more common globally and cross-culturally.

In her dissertation “Making Commons” (Seravalli, 2014), the industrial designer explores alternatives of production by suggesting a possible future that contains collaborations, open-production spaces and the sharing of knowledge. Sanders & Stappers, as well as Seravalli, have put an emphasis on designer-user collaboration. Seravalli mentions that it was almost impossible for her to engage with stakeholders such as producers, especially mass-manufacturing processes and artisans (Seravalli, 2014). Just like Anna Seravallis work, this thesis explores alternative ways of using design as a tool to challenge conventional ideas about production. A big difference is that Seravalli had a circular and local perspective, whereas this thesis explores how the local can benefit from being exposed in a global context.

In the tradition of Audre Lorde, Ahmed claims that we can use anger (and love) to create change.

— Ahmed, 2011
YOU SEE, YOU CAN MAKE THE MOST REALISTIC RENDERING OF A PIECE OF FURNITURE, BUT IF YOU LACK THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO MAKE IT, IT MAY LIKELY SIMPLY REMAIN ON PAPER.

— Seravalli, 2014

EMOTIONS ARISE IN THE OBJECT, OR EVEN AS THE OBJECT OF ITS OWN LIFE, ONLY BECAUSE IT CONCEALS HOW THEY ARE SHAPED BY DIFFERENT STORIES, INCLUDING STORIES ABOUT THE PRODUCTION (LABOR AND WORKING HOURS) AS WELL AS CIRCULATION AND TRADE.

— Ahmed, 2011
In this chapter, the iterative design process, based on a qualitative research, leading to the result of a design method will be described. The qualitative research consists of interactive partner visits, observations and iterative workshops.

Page 18:
Top: Overview of the work process

Bottom: Illustration of the interactive design visits to partner organisations. Icons from this schedule will indicate the event in the picture throughout this chapter.

Page 20: Illustration of IKEA, Industree PT and Rangsutra as a joint system.
Theoretical research about gender and monetary equality, aid critique, a colonial perspective as well as related academic works.

Observation of the design collaboration between IKEA and partner organisation. Workshops with artisans. Parts of design method tested in right context.

Design method with tools based on theoretical research, observations and interactive work.

Method needs to be tested in right context by IKEA.

Method ready to be used and developed for similar contexts.
# Schedule for Design Visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>DAY 2</th>
<th>DAY 3</th>
<th>DAY 4</th>
<th>DAY 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Artisan teaching Designer</td>
<td>Workshop task 1+2</td>
<td>Open day</td>
<td>Workshop task 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- **Summary Discussion**
IKEA
Next Generation

1. INDUSTREE
   Bangalore Office/Production
   - EKTHA
     Producer-owned enterprise
     Textiles
   - GREEN CRAFT
     Producer-owned enterprise
     Banana fibres
   - RURAL BASKET WEAVE PRODUCTION

2. RANGSUTRA
   Delhi office
   - Fabric Storage
   - Cutting Area
   - Pattern Cutter
   - Sample Makers
   - Quality Control
   - Embroidery Sampling
   - 12 RURAL EMBROIDERY CLUSTERS
     Textiles

3. RANGSUTRA
   Varanasi office
   - SWAAYAM KALA
     Textiles
   - PRODUCTION CENTRE
     Gangpur
     Sampling by Artisans
   - PRODUCTION CENTRE
     Mirzapour
     Sampling by Artisans
“IT IS ENCOURAGING FOR ME TO BE A PART OF THE DESIGN PROCESS, IT GIVES ME A LOT OF GOOD IDEAS.”

-Mani Nagaraj, master basket weaver at Green Craft, Industree PT
ITERATION

DESIGNER INTRODUCTION

Every workshop started with a presentation of myself and the thesis. The presentation was personal, showing pictures of my family, interests and home country. The participants also presented themselves, most of them talked about their role at work and their family status.

Before starting the actual tasks, the participants had a look in the IKEA catalogue and at moodboards of Scandinavian homes. There was also a short discussion, followed by Q&A’s about how people use and decorate their homes in Scandinavia.

WORKSHOP

The first task was quite open and with little involvement from me – I just gave encouragement and assisted when needed. Instead of making one product that was supposed to be inspired by the chosen moodboard, they furnished the whole room. The participants did not take inspiration from, or even use, the moodboards and they all prioritised function over form. Three sample makers out of four took leading roles within their group.

Based on observations from the first task, the second one was given with a lot more directions. Both groups also had to present and discuss a sketch, materials and colour before making the actual prototypes. They all got instructions to look at the chosen moodboard to be inspired by colours and composition. Both groups used the moodboards as a guideline for how to place the furniture and what items to involve in the room.

For the third task, the participants had to work individually and use the knowledge from the previous two tasks. They were each given a picture of a rattan product as inspiration for designing and making a piece aimed at an IKEA customer.

FEEDBACK

“We learned a lot from working together with the artisans trying to make prototypes. Now we have a better understanding for the time it takes.”
- Management team

“With IKEA, we often make the same kind of weaves and it was encouraging to get the chance to come up with new ones.”
- Mani Nagaraj and Rosilina Mark, master basket weavers.

“It helped us to see the IKEA catalogue and moodboards of Scandinavian homes - now we understand why certain products are more attractive than others.”
- All ten participants

From the first workshop I learned that I needed to be clearer in my instructions, and also that three tasks in two days is reasonable. The IKEA catalogue and moodboards were very useful tools, as long as the participants were encouraged how and why to use them.

Top of page: The material I had prepared for the workshop.
Page 23:
Top: The results from task 2 during the workshop in Bangalore.
Bottom: Participants making the individual task during the workshop.
WORKSHOP - TASK 2

CHOOSE:
- 1 MOODBOARD FOR INSPIRATION
- WALL COLOUR, WINDOWS, DOOR, PLANTS, RUGS
- SKETCH BEDROOM OR LIVING ROOM
- DISCUSS WITH DESIGNER AND EACH OTHER
- DIVIDE THE WORK WITHIN THE GROUP
- PROTOTYPE THE ROOM, 3 HOURS
- PRESENT
“OUR EMBROIDERY TRADITION IS BASED ON THIS TRIANGLE SHAPE, AND WE ALWAYS STRIVE TOWARDS MAKING SYMMETRICAL MOTIVES.”

— Papu Devi Chauhan, artisan at Rangsutra

“CONFIDENCE IS A KEY TO GET MORE WOMEN INTO WEAVING - THEY NEED TO BUILD ON THEIR SELF-CONFIDENCE TO FEEL THAT IT’S A CRAFT THEY CAN DO AS WELL AS MEN.”

— Krithika Shashi Acharya, designer Rangsutra
“GIVE US BIG ORDERS FROM IKEA.”

“If we have a lot of work to do in the day, we sleep good at night.”

—Rangsutra artisans, conversation during visit to Dandkala embroidery cluster
ITERATION

WORKSHOP

During the first workshop with Industree PT, it became obvious that fewer, clearer instructions are essential to help the participants get started. After the first task, the artisans told me that they did not think about the moodboards—they just created homes they had in their mind. They enjoyed the task, but would have liked to have had more time.

The small prototypes were well made, some of them very strong designs in themselves. It was obvious that they all have a good sense of colour combinations. For a Scandinavian market, they could use less tassels and think about making the beds fluffy. In Scandinavia, the climate is often cold, so people want the beds to look warm and cosy.

Workshop task two:
- a moodboard with pictures from a scandinavian home for inspiration
- Sofa or bed, livingroom/bedroom
- wallpaper and window or doors
- 3 materials (colours)
- 4 colours for thread
- Rugs, either printed IKEA rugs or make your own
- Plants
- Prototype a room, 2 hours
- Present

For the second task, the participants were told to think about the feedback from the first one, and to look at the moodboards alongside the IKEA catalogue for inspiration as well as understanding the context. Also, keeping in mind that in Scandinavia, it is common to use neutral colours on big surfaces with strong colours as accents.

FEEDBACK

Since none of the participants spoke English, and I don’t speak the local language, their group feedback was translated by Krithika.

“We have learned many new things about IKEA and Scandinavian homes, we enjoyed to see the catalogue and the moodboards.”

“To be part of a design process was a new experience, both exciting and empowering.”

“Most of us like to be a part of taking decisions, only one of us preferred to be told what to do.”

Top of page: Material given to one group, first workshop task.

Page 24:
Top: Napasar handloom weaving cluster, 45 minutes outside Bikaner.
Bottom: Papu teaching me traditional soof embroidery.

Page 25: Dandkali, one of five embroidery clusters that produce for IKEA.

Page 27:
Top: Result from first task at workshop in Bikaner.
Bottom: Result from second task at workshop in Bikaner.
“WE DIDN’T LOOK AT THE MOODBOARDS FOR INSPIRATION BECAUSE WE HAVE ALL IDEAS IN OUR HEADS. THAT IS HOW WE HAVE LEARNED AND HOW WE WORK.”

— Artisans, workshop, task 1, Rangsutra Bikaner

“HERE WE USED TONAL COLOURS - THAT IS IKEA STYLE. FOR SOME REASON THEY ALSO SEEM TO LIKE A LOT OF DARK COLOURS BUT WE DON’T KNOW WHY.”

— Artisans, workshop, task 2, Rangsutra Bikaner
PAPU DRAWING DESIGNS FOR AN IKEA CUSHION COVER DURING THE WORKSHOPS THIRD TASK.
“BEFORE I WAS ONLY ALLOWED TO BE IN THE HOUSE, NOW I HAVE AN IDENTITY.”

“IT IS NOW COMMON THAT OTHER MEN IN OUR SURROUNDINGS WANT THEIR WIVES TO WORK AS WELL.”

“INSTEAD OF SITTING AT HOME AND GOSSIPING I AM CONSTANTLY LEARNING THINGS. IT SHARPENS THE MIND.”

“SOMETIMES THE COLOURS ARE A BIT DULL AND THAT IS DEPRESSING.”

-Renu, Beena Devi, Meera Devi, Saroj Devi, Sunita Prajapati, conversation during visit to Rangsutra Mirzapour production centre.
ITERATION

WORKSHOP

With Rangsutra in Varanasi, the same workshop as in Bikaner was performed. Since the women in the Varanasi district are less experienced artisans, the workshop happened over three days instead of two. It was difficult to get the women engaged in the teamwork during the first task. They all worked in silence, and instead of furnishing the room together, they made a set of bed linen each.

Based on the first day, they received constant encouragement and design support during the second. The extra effort seemed to encourage them to work in teams and they all put a lot more effort into the task.

The last day they got to do the individual task - a few participants got started immediately, whilst most of them seemed to be paralyzed to even get started. During this day, they received even more design support in terms of suggestions for inspiration, demonstrations of how to sketch with pen or just by folding papers. They all managed to complete the task, but for a few it was a real struggle.

FEEDBACK

Once again, the group feedback was translated to me.

“We have never done a workshop before where so many decisions are up to us.”

“We feel proud to have participated in the workshop.”

“Now we understand what a Scandinavian home can look like.”

“It was hard to draw our own designs but felt a bit better when we got support.”

The artisans in Varanasi are obviously less skilled than the ones in Bikaner, but they still have a good sense for colour and how to combine them. They have all worked hard to get to the point they are at today, and even though half of the workshop participants were shy and lacking confidence they still made an effort.

Top of page: Material used during workshop introduction, Varanasi.

Page 29: Conversation with a group of artisans at Mirzapour production centre outside of Varanasi.

*Renu doesn’t have a surname which is common in India.

Page 31: Result from the first task during the workshop at Gangpur production centre, Varanasi.
"INSTEAD OF FEELING SAD BECAUSE WE DON’T KNOW SOOF AND OTHER EMBROIDERY TECHNIQUES WE CAN USE THE ONES WE HAVE TO DEVELOP DIFFERENT MOTIVES AND GRAPHIC DESIGNS.

THIS HAS OPENED A WHOLE NEW WAY OF THINKING.”

-Rangnastra artisans, workshop Varansi district.
FROM ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS TO DESIGNING THE PROPOSAL

- all statements are based on the qualitative research described in this chapter.

• All artisans that participated said that the main reason to work is to earn a consistent salary.
• Majority of artisans connected to Rangsutra have no interest in becoming designers.
• Most of Rangsutras' artisans gained confidence by being included in the design process.
• Majority of artisans feel happier working with colourful products.
• The workshops gave all artisans a better understanding of the products when they were shown the context of it.
• All artisans appreciated the workshops and said that the experience was useful.
• All artisans enjoyed learning new skills - this adds to their confidence.
DESIGNING THE PROPOSAL

YOU SEEM TO THINK THE OPPOSITE WAY TO MOST DESIGNERS I'VE MEET.

— Dipti Singh, program manager Rangsutra Varanasi

This chapter presents the proposal, a design process comprised of tools – in this case an embroidery bank, a design template and a workshop kit.

Based on the preparatory readings (academic framework) and the learnings from the qualitative research process, I propose a design process with tools to increase the collaboration between designers (Sweden) and artisans (India). It emphasises both the designer’s and artisan’s skills so that they can benefit one another.

1. INSPIRATION

In this case, the inspiration is an embroidery bank. It is designed to show different techniques, compositions and colour combinations, on 50x50cm fabric - the size of a standard IKEA cushion cover. Both IKEA designers and artisans will have a library each and, over time this library can be developed with more designs. The library in this project has been co-created by me and the embroidery artisan Papu Devi Chauhan, with translation by design manager Babita Gahlot, Rangsutra, Bikaner.

2. INSTRUCTION

Since knowing the context (feedback from iterative workshops) makes work easier and more inclusive for artisans, I have made a design template that will make it easy for IKEA’s designers to use when making instructions for new products. The template does not only have pages for product drawings, but also includes any visual/contextual information on the product.

3. WORKSHOP

This is a refined version of the workshop kit that was used during the iterative design process. It is made to be durable, as well as light enough and small enough for the designers to carry in their hand luggage. There is also a template to use for the designer when preparing wall colours, interior and any other surfaces they may need. Both the model of the room and the template are based on A4-size, since most of the partners use A4 printers.

THE EMBROIDERY BANK

Preparing for going back to Bikaner and co-creating the embroidery bank with Papu, I made a digital embroidery bank in illustrator. From this library, I made different designs on 50x50cm canvases that I printed out. I also put together moodboards of traditional Swedish embroidery for us to use as inspiration – with the aim for us to better understand one another’s cultures and help us with our collaboration.

In the beginning, I was showing Papu what design to embroider with what colours. We worked together over six days. Papu took the initiative and became more and more involved in the design process, up to the point where we were making the majority of decisions together.

Papu showed me more types of embroidery that I added to the digital library, and came up with ideas of colour combinations that I would never think of. I, on the other hand, pushed her to think about the Scandinavian market and new compositions, whilst still using strong, vibrant colours. We sat side by side, discussing the digital design, before Papu started a new embroidery. She, using yarn to show how to use the colours and me, re-arranging and colouring the motifs on my computer.

It was both rewarding and efficient to work like this, and a similar activity is presented in the suggested design process.

Page 34: Illustrator sketches of designs for the co-created embroidery library.
NOW, AFTER THIS WEEK, PAPU AND I FEEL COMFORTABLE TO WORK WITH YOU.

— Babita Gahlot, design and sampling manager at Rangsutra, Bikaner.

PAPU DEVI CHAUHAN - THE ARTISAN

Papu learned embroidery from her mother when she was very young. She is from Sevenadi, in Pugal district, but now lives in Bikaner with her husband, their two sons and her husband’s family.

Papu works Monday to Saturday in the Rangsutra office where she has worked for two years. Before that, she was doing embroidery production for them but now she is so skilled that she has become their main sample maker for embroidery. If there’s too many samples for her to make on time alone then she gets help from the artisans living in the villages. She likes her job and finds it motivating to finish a piece quickly.

She has never been a part of any IKEA workshop and the designers making the SEI collections don’t involve her in the design process. Krithika and Babita discuss with her when they’re in the process of making samples. She would like to be part of the design process and she’s not afraid to work with new people. In fact, she is very confident.

SOOF EMBROIDERY

Soof is a common type of embroidery in Rajasthan. The individual shapes don’t mean anything special, except the peacock which is a common motif, but the geometry is important. A triangle shape is the base for almost all of the embroidery and mostly the motifs are mirrored. Even in the process of making an embroidery, Papu has a geometric way of thinking.

The colours used are vibrant and many strong colours are used in the same piece. In most places in India, people want to be surrounded by strong colours as that brings joy. Papu says that after having done embroidery for ten years, she knows what colour to use where in her opinion.

FEEDBACK

“We don’t use illustrator like you do so that was a new experience. It was good to look at the colours together before starting to work.”
- Babita Gahlot

“It was easy and clear for me to see the computer sketches. After this week I have got many new ideas.”
- Papu Devi Chauhan

“It was good that you brought pictures for inspiration, that gave us ideas. If we could work like this with IKEA that would be preferable.”
- Papu Devi Chauhan and Babita Gahlot
“IT HAS BEEN A GOOD WEEK AND YOU HAVE ALSO BEEN WORKING VERY HARD. I FEEL GOOD”

- Papu Devi Chauhan
PROPOSAL: A DESIGN METHOD WITH TOOLKIT

WHEN WE HAVE PRODUCED PRODUCTS FOR IKEA WE HAVEN’T UNDERSTOOD HOW OR WHERE THEY WILL BE USED... NOW EVERYTHING FELL INTO PLACE.

― Rangsutra artisans in Varanasi

This chapter propose a design process aimed for IKEA, or other global design company, when making products in partnership with social entrepreneurs.

The proposed design process is based on a five weeks case study of IKEA’s (Sweden) partnership with the social entrepreneurs Rangsutra and Industree (India). It is not a groundbreaking result, but rather an obvious reminder of something that I believe many designers are aware of, or have experienced. Where the suggested design process is aimed to support a positive social impact, the toolkit is aimed to be used for textile products – and in this specific example embroidery designs. The inspiration (the embroidery bank) and the toolkit is entirely based on my conclusions and findings as a textile designer during the qualitative research period. To create the suggested design template, I have used my own experience from working with fashion products and developed it with the conclusions of the research in mind.

At this point I am the only designer to have tried the proposed co-designing – and not for a long enough time. To take it forward and see how it works, the process needs to be tested over a longer period of time, with both artisans and designers, to give accurate results. It is also crucial to get feedback from designers at IKEA who have been working with SEI.

From the insights I got during the research period in India, my conclusion is that the majority of artisans that I met priorities consistent work to get monetary freedom and safety. Several artisans, especially the group I had conversation with at Mirzapour production center, also told me that learning new things and developing their skills at work give them a stronger self-confidence. This is useful for them at home and in the society when they start taking part in decision-taking, as well as taking more control over their own life.

I expect this proposed co-design process to enable the artisans to gain even more knowledge about the products, the western market and the end user and I also hope this will contribute to strengthen their confidence. I also expect it to work the other way around, that the designer will learn more about the artisans skills as well as the craft. I expect both parties to grow within their roles, as individuals as well as a team in a co-design process. I believe this will impact the final product in the sense that the end user finds it desirable, which in the longer run could provide more orders and consistent work for the artisans.

Referring to both Moyo (2009) and Yunus (2007) it takes more than monetary aid to create a better future. It also takes investments of time, effort and value and that is what co-design process suggests. And like Krithika Shashi Acharya at Rangsutra said, it’s a two-way communication where both parties are equally important.

I believe that this way of working, as well as the toolkit, could be developed into a method flexible enough that you can adapt it for different types of products. In this early stage of development, my idea has been specific to this project in India, with Indian cultural awareness playing a big role in the final proposal. The next step would be for this proposal to be fully tested with textile production in India to see if it can have a positive social impact, and if so it could be used as the basis for future co-designed products.

I believe co-designing like this can increase cultural awareness and be beneficial for all stakeholders involved - because at the end of the day we are all individuals with different cultural and professional backgrounds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT - SPECIAL OCCASION</th>
<th>PRODUCT NAME</th>
<th>Collection: X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTEXT - THE HOME</td>
<td>PRODUCT NAME</td>
<td>Collection: X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>PRODUCT NAME</td>
<td>Collection: X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DETAILS</td>
<td>PRODUCT NAME</td>
<td>Collection: X</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLEAN SKETCH</td>
<td>PRODUCT NAME</td>
<td>Collection: X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOODBOARD</td>
<td>PRODUCT NAME</td>
<td>Collection: X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DESIGN TEMPLATE
WORKSHOP - THE KIT.

Moodboard

Surface Colours

WORKSHOP - SMALL SCALE ROOM, FLAT PACKAGED.
**GLOBALISING LOCAL CRAFT WITH A SOCIAL MISSION**

*The proposed design process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Designer being inspired by the embroidery library when making design templates to the artisan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Artisan receives design template from designer and uses the embroidery library when starting sampling process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Artisan preparing for workshop with designer by making first samples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Designer travels to artisan to have a workshop and together develop the designs of new products. More designs are added to the library and the new products are improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Products going through IKEA testing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Increased knowledge about the craft and artisans skills.**
- **Increased knowledge about the global market and improvement of artisans own skills.**
- **Added inspiration to the embroidery bank for future use.**
- **Desirable hand crafted products for the many people, sold at IKEA.**
As mentioned under approach and positioning, the end user has played a passive role in this exploration. I believe that if the end user would participate during a designer-artisan workshop, all parties would gain useful information. IKEA could realise where they can push the boundaries of design, the artisans could understand how to embrace their cultural craft in making products for a global market, and the end user may be able to buy bold products from IKEA. However, this would be a later step considering this proposal first needs to be tested in context over a long enough period of time to give any result. One interesting aspect is that the collections made within SEI only reach a limited amount of markets that differ from collection to collection. If these markets were known from the beginning of the design process perhaps designers and artisans could benefit from involving the end user from the beginning. I know that has been the case in a collection being developed as I write, but I don’t know how this information has affected the different stakeholders.

Today, the majority of the artisans working for Rangsutra have very little or no interest in becoming designers, said both Krithika and Dipti at Rangsutra. Referring to what Krithika said, women in India generally need to build on their confidence, but this has potential for change. Let’s say IKEA would implement this design process and the artisans would increase their knowledge about design and the global market – there is a big chance that some of them would develop a desire to become part of the design and decision-making process. In that case, this design process might only be convenient to use in the start-up phase with social entrepreneurs.

One can question why we should understand one another’s backgrounds to have a global business transaction. I would say that we don’t, business would happen as usual even if artisans and designers never met. I don’t believe this approach needs to be applied within all kinds of production transactions but if a wealthy company wants to make a social impact I believe it’s crucial to think beyond the monetary transaction and statistics.

Meeting the women at Mirzapour production centre was particularly useful. They spoke about joining Rangsutra, and how earning their own salary has created an overall positive impact on their lives, both at home and at work.

Traditionally, Indian women are excluded from most decision-making in their lives. I hope that through work, these women can gain confidence and awareness of their own rights. It also makes them think positively about their children’s future, now that they grow up with confident mothers who earn their own salaries.

Working with a project like this, it is also important to remember that all people in the world don’t strive towards becoming richer, moving to big cities or travelling the world. Most of the women I met during this exploration expressed that they wanted to earn a consistent salary to pay for the basics in life, occasionally being able to buy jewellery. Most important to them is having a simple and calm life with time for family and friends.

Coming from a progressive culture, where my female ancestors had to fight for the rights that women enjoy today, it is easy to forget that these issues take time. I cannot prove the exact impact my proposal would have on an Indian female artisan, but I know for sure that it wouldn’t immediately stop things like domestic violence. I am a designer, and the focus of this exploration is what happens at work. I can only hope that the confidence gained from learnings at work, can help to improve life for these women at home.

THE MAIN REASON WHY WE WANT TO WORK IS TO EARN OUR OWN CONSISTENT SALARY, THAT MAKES US MORE INDEPENDENT FROM OUR FAMILIES AND OUR HUSBANDS.

— Vast majority of Rangsutra artisans.
During the workshops, I noticed that I received very little negative feedback. This does not make me think that my work has been exceptionally good - I think it’s mainly a cultural thing and the fact that I was associated with IKEA. I know from previous experience and my Indian friends that people in general in India strive towards being helpful and easy-going, but I was also aware of the underlying respect that most of these people carry for IKEA as a business partner.

A weak link in this exploration is the absence of IKEA’s designers; no one who designed a collection for this initiative has yet had the time to speak to me. The qualitative research has been carried out in India, with the partner organisations only. This meant I have only experienced one side of the story, and have had to make assumptions about the designers’ work. However, this could be an asset as it potentially helps me to keep an open mind.

The design process I propose has not yet been tried out as a complete process in its right context - it now needs to be tested, evaluated and reworked. I don’t believe that this proposal would work as a global solution. Just like Ahrens and Guetz (2015) pinpointed in their thesis, cultural awareness, in combination with a transnational strategy, might be the best way to apply this design process globally.

One criticism I have of my project is how ambitious and long-term it is, perhaps too much so for a master thesis. Coming to the end of my thesis does not mean I have come to the end of this project, in fact it is just beginning. This has been an exploration in how a design process, working with a social mission, can look, and how it can better benefit the stakeholders involved. I would say it is a case study with a result that prepares for a method to be tested and put in use.

As I mention earlier in this work, the relations we build with people we interact with are equally important to guides on paper. I have made a conclusion based on the research I made in India, and based on this proposed an alternative design process. This is my journey, my experiences and my findings. I am currently the one to steer this project - but it doesn’t have to stay that way. I do think that if something like this would be implemented by IKEA, it would be beneficial to let me keep developing this design process on the foundation of the relations I’ve built during my time in India. And for future use it might be beneficial to have a separate design method for this initiative that demand more time out in the field as a designer. Maybe it even needs to be a requirement no matter if you are an in-house IKEA designer or working freelance.

My intention is that the result of this work should not be dependent on my presence, but at the moment it is. However, taking the time to explore these ideas in real-world situations, and work with these women in a way previously untested by IKEA's design team, I feel confident about the potential for long-term social change if my proposal is used by IKEA when developing collections with their social entrepreneurs.

Have social structures ever changed rapidly?
This chapter discusses the difficulties of turning the project into an exhibition piece. Inspired by the visit to Dandkala embroidery cluster, and with the help from other creatives, a pink cube was formed.

It appeared that this project was quite a challenge to show in an exhibition context. From the beginning the idea was to exhibit posters with quotes — similar to the graphic design in this essay. After throwing around different ideas I took the decision to try and re-create the experience of working in India, inspired by the pink embroidery center in Dandkala, as well as Indian truck painting. In the corner, a cube was framed in pink polyester fabric, typical for Indian women’s sarees, and embroidered fabric doormats encouraged the visitors to step inside. It smelled of rose and herbs, and a soundshow played Indian music mixed with the sounds of honking horns in the streets. The material used and created in India was placed on a pink fabric on the floor, more to create a feeling than to explain the whole project.

During the exhibition, I’ve noticed that most people have a brief look and I have not seen many people actually take off their shoes and step inside the cube. It seems like that is more popular for children, who love to play with the miniature models and throw things around. The people who I have spoken to have either been people I know or people I’ve asked to come and look at my piece. I realised that when exhibited like this the project doesn’t speak for itself, but is a good tool to trigger peoples interest and start to ask me questions. It has also been very easy for me to talk about the project and explain it when I’ve been able to use the cube.

For me the exhibition has been an experiment in how to materialize a project like this – which has been a challenge. Maybe a traditional exhibition is not the way to go about presenting a work like this, because it seems like it demands quite a lot of time and interest from the visitor to really grasp the overall concept.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TUTORS
Forever grateful to Martin Strid, brother and founder of eat:em, for the exceptional tutoring. Thank you for always taking the time and for encouraging me to constantly improve my work.

Martin Avila, Researcher in Industrial Design
Erik Widmark, Service Designer and Business Developer
Sara Teleman, Illustrator and Writer

ADVISORS
Linda-Marie Björkemar, Project Leader IKEA ’Social Entrepreneurs Initiative’
Sandra Andersson, Graphic Designer

PARTICIPANTS INDIA
Industree PT team
Rangsutra Varanasi team - extra thanks to Dipti Singh and Manjuria Natham
Rangsutra Bikaner team - extra thanks to Babita Gahlot and Krithika Shashi Acharya

Big thanks to everyone who participated in the workshops in Bangalore, Bikaner and Varanasi.

Papu Devi Chauhan, embroidery artisan at Rangsutra in Bikaner, for a great collaboration, your hard work and for all the inspiration.

SPECIAL THANKS
Paulin Machado and Love Sjöberg - my home in India.
Isabella Pehrsson for being the best BFF and taking your time for conversation, discussion and feedback.

And to Matt Ransom for always supporting me, reading every word I’ve written, and for just being you.

QUOTES
I am aware some quotes and statements have grammatical errors or are not ’correct English’. However, I have chosen to include them to give a better understanding of the challenges faced when communicating with large groups using a translator.


Moyo, Dambisa (2009). Dead Aid - Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa


Sharma, Parul (2015). Mänskliga rättigheter i Indien


Wiesner-Hanks, Mary (2011). Gender in History – Global Perspectives

Yunus, Muhammad (2007). Banker to the poor