

the international Charter of Artistic Craftsmanship

Definitions

- 1) Creative craftsmanship was the first phenomenon to mark man's existence. The crafted object – long before any other evolutionary, organisational or productive form – was the first identifying sign of the presence of human life. In these terms, the artistic handicraft objects contribute to create the identity of a people, intended as collection traditions, knowledge and distinctive marks that make them recognisable and unique.
The artistic handicraft creations are therefore to be considered as an expression of the material culture, linked to the environment where the artistic phenomena and the art objects are manifested or produced.
So objects of artistic and traditional craftsmanship must be considered as a people's artworks, bearing a spiritual and cultural message, as well as being witness to traditions and creativity to be passed on to future generations.
- 2) Works of **artistic craftsmanship** include:
 - a) creations, production and works of high aesthetic value, whether inspired by forms, models, decoration, styles and techniques that are traditional or historical, or the result of individual creative development and of personal and artistic forms of expression;
 - b) works which are mainly carried out using manual techniques, at highly professional technical level, using equipment, but excluding wholly mass-produced works; separate mechanised or automatic work stages are allowed, using innovative techniques and high-technology instruments.
 - c) The definition of artistic craftsmanship also covers works of restoration, designed to conserve, consolidate or restore works of art, or objects of architectural, archaeological, ethnographic, bibliographic or archival heritage¹.
- 3) The sectors of traditional and artistic workmanship and their respective activities are defined in accordance with the European classification of economic activities, NACE rev.2 published in the Journal Officiel of 20th December 2006 (see the Enclosure of this Charter).

Values

Artistic craftsmanship contains several kinds of values.

- 1) **Economic value.** As well as a cultural heritage, artistic craftsmanship is a key economic and productive resource: a widespread productive network, made up of small companies, workshops and SMI's that are deeply rooted in their local territory, and which constitute a not inconsiderable part of economic value created by the manufacturing sectors.
- 2) **Cultural value.** Artistic craftsmanship is a unique cultural heritage and expression of society throughout the ages. Craft businesses are the fruit of an age-old artistic and productive tradition. They are repositories of material and immaterial knowledge, rooted in their local territory. They are also bearers of "universal" cul-

¹ It will be necessary to harmonise the various theoretical and legal definitions of restoration work in different countries, in order to reach definitions that are, as far as possible, univocal and shared.

tural values, with their emphasis on design, on the project and on history, and contaminations between other, very different cultural sectors are frequent.

3) Social value. Artistic craftsmanship also contains a “social value”, created through interaction with the economy and society of its local area, with the community and with the surrounding environment. In fact, artistic craftsmanship always has deep roots in the local territory, is integrated into the culture and influences local society. The question of transmission of craft skills should be considered in the light of the above: because, as well as safeguarding traditions and skills, such transmission is essential to protect the social structure of local areas. Craft working is a widespread type of occupation that supports the local economy and small-scale production. It creates jobs, social stability and potential future development. Many areas have age-old productive realities, which risk extinction for lack of generational handover. Artistic craftsmanship is also the primary motor of sustainable economic development in underdeveloped or depressed areas.

Proposals

Towards a European political course for Artistic Handicraft

Introduction

In the light of the above, it is clear that artistic craftsmanship is a sector with unique characteristics, from a productive point-of-view, from that of company dimensions, as well as from that of its cultural and social content.

Political, strategic and action lines must therefore be defined at European and international level, specially conceived for supporting, protecting, enhancing and promoting the artistic handicraft sector.

1. Communication and Promotion. Decided communication efforts must be made to promote the sector which is not clearly identified by the final consumer. Top quality artistic products have every right to be included in the “refined” and conceptual luxury category, which looks for values that go beyond appearance and brand. However there is very limited real knowledge of the artistic production “districts”, that is to say, of the places and areas where historically such production is found, with its high, added formal and cultural value. Finally, the field of artistic craftsmanship – in its present guise – has little appeal to the younger generations, hence the problem of generational handover. The image of craftsmanship should be brought up-to-date and made known to a wider public: of course, there will have to be several different messages, for the various “spirits” of artistic craftsmanship. The most recent available media must be used for communicating and promoting the artistic handicraft, especially for facilitating communication with the young generations: we can therefore think of an increasingly greater and more profitable use of the web, also through the creation of thematic channels where it will be possible to tell “stories”.

2. Internationalisation and commercialisation. Artistic craftsmanship requires customised projects to aid internationalisation and to sustain commercialisation. The process of internationalisation promotes the products of artistic craftsmanship, but also a lifestyle, a philosophy and a production ethic: for these reasons, artistic craftsmanship is the best possible ambassador of “Made in...” products. Internationalisation and commercialisation should follow four main guidelines:

a. Participation in trade fairs and expos. There should be a circuit of trade manifestations for business visitors and/or for the general public. These should be “approved” by the artistic craftsmanship trade associations and should be marketplaces for the sale of craft products. Next to the trade fair event it is necessary to consider the implementation of support, training and accompaniment tools for the businesses, allowing them to best take advantage of the commercial and exhibition occasions.

b. Specialist shops and/or galleries. Networks of shops specialising in the sale of artistic craftsmanship should be identified and/or created.

c. Links with standard commercial circuits and with top level interior design.

d. Co-promotion initiatives with large-scale distribution.

3. Research and innovation. In order to **give strategic responses to businesses’ needs of innovation**, a new concept of innovation should be defined, that is compatible with the dimensions and characteristics of artistic craft companies. Alongside the classic innovation regarding the product or technology, this new concept involves innovation of the cognitive and organisational processes required to create innovation that is lasting and not sporadic. This is **strategic innovation, sustained by a type of organisational innovation**, partly thanks to the elaboration of models for the development of network systems².

4. Training. Sustaining training models inside businesses and activating tutoring circuits. Mapping on a European scale, both at secondary and tertiary levels, training suitable for artistic craftsmanship, with the further aim of setting up a European training system. A network might also be set up of schools of excellence that already have traditional artistic craftsmanship in their training courses. A sort of “continuous training” for craftsmen might be foreseen, or rather, their constant updating in technical and productive aspects, as well as aesthetic and formal ones, in marketing, product communication and legislation. Creating an integrated service system that includes schools as research locations. Training in craftsmanship at European level is made necessary, too, by new requirements for continuous training and lifelong learning that are brought about by technological innovation, communication and other aspects of business activities.

5. Education. The history of artistic craftsmanship must be written on a national and international level, with reference also to the development and history of the principal arts: there is need to introduce courses in the history of artistic craftsmanship at all educational levels. This would have the effect

²This concept of strategic-organisational innovation, in connection with a network innovation model, is totally congruent with European guidelines concerning innovation strategy.

of strengthening a common European culture and creativity, necessary for the affirmation of a common European identity in artistic craftsmanship.

6. Tourism. Tourism is one of Europe's chief industries in terms of job creation and turnover: around 80% of European tourists travel for pleasure, while the remaining 20% travel for business³. The craft sector is a fundamental component of tourism⁴, an authentic "tourist attraction", thus it is essential to exploit the synergy between crafts and tourism, for reciprocal benefits and development.

7. Museums. The connection between artistic craftsmanship and museums or museum circuits is yet another facet of the extremely close link, already mentioned, between artistic craftsmanship and the culture – in the widest sense – of the place of production and origin. This is why the museum system is an important partner in the development and exploitation of artistic craftsmanship, using two main lines of action:

- a. Artistic craftsmanship and museum bookshops.** Objects inspired by the artistic heritage should be produced and sold, in order to develop a link between craft and art, and to contrast the "souvenir" mentality by offering quality products, that suggest an original interpretation of the work of art itself.
- b. Temporary exhibitions connected with museums.** Spaces attached and/or close by museum institutions can serve as places for organising temporary exhibitions - personal or collective - dedicated to the best of artistic and traditional craftsmanship, contributing to certain types of production such as modern decorative arts. The organisation and co-organisation must be developed, in partnership with associated museums, of exhibitions dedicated to artistic craftsmanship.

³ Source: World Tourism Organisation.

⁴ Studies carried out in Italy in 2002 showed that artistic craftsmanship comes third, after beautiful scenery and artistic heritage, on the list of attractions for Italian and foreign tourists. The majority of purchases are made directly at the workshops, and strengthen the bond with the territory that the tourist resides in, even temporarily, while maintaining more vivid memories of the holiday experience.