

# Craft as cultural ecologically located practice. Comparative case studies of textile crafts in Cyprus, Estonia and Peru

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## Abstract

*This paper reports comparative case studies in three countries, Estonia, Cyprus and Peru. Through these, the cultural ecologies of six textile craft practitioners, two in each country, were investigated using interview-based situational analysis. Cultural ecology is concerned with transactional relationships between people and the environments they inhabit. It provides a lens on the processes of continuity and change that shape cultural patterns and cultural traditions. Interviews were conducted in open format around questions about biographical and professional practice. Relationships between practitioners' personal histories and their craft practices were explored. Outcomes suggest that the cultural ecologies are profoundly shaped by the transmission of customs, beliefs and values from generation to generation which, in turn, are located within a place of social interaction conferring a sense of belonging and an environment for the formation of social identities. These attachments powerfully influence continuity in the craft traditions. The interrelated processes of globalisation and technological development are the dominant agents of change. Responses to these pressures vary with the practitioners in the three countries and are linked to factors associated with cultural resilience.*

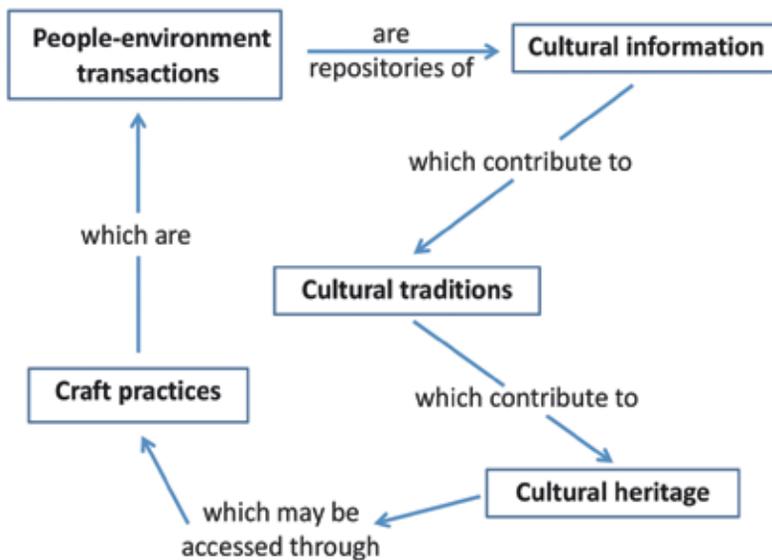
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## Introduction

The term cultural ecology is attributed to anthropologist Julian Steward (1955) to denote the reciprocal relationship between biological and cultural processes in the study of adaptations of humans to their environment, where environment is taken in the broadest sense to include its psychological and social elements

as well as the physical. Dillon has developed Steward’s formulation of cultural ecology by shifting the focus to the transactions that characterise human-environment relationships (Dillon 2015; 2017). ‘Transaction’ means the act of doing something that moves a situation ‘beyond’ its existing condition. In a cultural ecology, this movement happens through processes of ‘exchange’. Exchanges take place continuously between people, individually or collectively, and every aspect of their environment – physical, social, psychological, economic, religious and so on, and any combination of these. Exchange implies reciprocal interaction for both the situation and those engaged in the situation. Through transactions people shape their environments and, in turn, are shaped by them. Human existence is an endless nexus of transactions.

Each and every transaction, be it through conversation, the processes of making something, or operating in a market, is a repository of ‘cultural information’. The sum of the transactions at a given time in a given place defines ‘cultural patterns’. Through looking at cultural patterns, local and regional ways of living and working can be described, and where these patterns are strongly defined they form the basis of ‘cultural traditions’. Where cultural traditions are enduring they contribute to ‘cultural heritage’. It follows that the patterns and traditions, and the associated cultural heritage, can be studied by accessing the information contained in transactions in the cultural ecology. The route into the cultural ecology which is the subject of this paper, and its theoretical framing, is through craft practices (Figure 1, see also Kokko, Dillon 2011).



**Figure 1.** Generalized relations between information, traditions and heritage in a cultural ecology of craft practice. *Figure by Patrick Dillon.*

Through comparative case studies of two practitioners in each of three countries, Estonia, Cyprus and Peru, we researched the cultural ecologies in which textile craft practitioners operate. The aim of the research was to investigate practitioners' personal histories and their craft practices as 'windows' into the processes of continuity and change that shape the cultural patterns and cultural traditions represented in three geographically discrete countries with distinctive cultural histories and different socio-economic environments.

### **Continuity and change in craft practice in a cultural ecological frame**

There are many definitions of crafts (see Kouhia 2016 for a summary) but an essential aspect for many of them is that making crafts, 'to craft', means human-material transactions. As Adamson (2010: 2) states, a crafts-person applies his or her skill and knowledge of materials to relatively small-scale production. Since this paper focuses on the cultural ecology of craft practices, these are taken broadly as the activities involved in making functional or ornamental artefacts, and the lifestyles associated with these activities. Typically, the materials are derived from primary resources (mineral, plant and animal) and have some characteristics that are location specific. For example, textile raw materials produced in one location will have different properties to materials produced in another. The way the materials are prepared, even before the processes of turning them into artefacts, will vary from place to place, craft practitioner to craft practitioner (Dillon 2017). In the case studies, the fundamental cultural ecological transactions are between the craft practitioner and the application of his or her knowledge and skill in transforming materials in a given socio-economic milieu.

Craft practices and the making of craft artefacts are only part of a complex mix of transactions in a cultural ecology. People-environment transactions are shaped by, and are manifestations of, social norms, economic conditions, material resources, means of exchange, institutional structures, human resources (knowledge, skills), beliefs, values, attitudes, tastes, needs, wants, patterns of production and consumption and much more. All of these factors interact in a state of flux, a 'restless dynamic'. In such a dynamic, notions of 'continuity' and 'change' are relative. Nothing is ever wholly unchanging, there is no absolute stability. Certain factors (e.g. enduring beliefs, limitations of knowledge, availability of resources) may interact in such a way as to maintain relative stability and continuity. **Other** factors (e.g. new ideas, improvisations, changed market conditions) may interact to promote change. This restless dynamic is important

to an understanding of the tensions between continuity and change which characterize cultural traditions and cultural heritage. Change may be gradual or it may happen rapidly. It may be planned, or it may emerge. It may be incremental, with subtle reconfigurations of the cultural ecology, or it may fundamentally re-arrange it.

A typical trajectory, as the craftsperson goes about his or her everyday work, is represented by the horizontal arrow running through the diagram in Figure 2a. The oval shapes enclosing stars represent the 'cultural tradition' in which the craftsperson is working, in other words the ways in which the individual typically works with tools and materials producing something that has a recognisable function and/or is for ornamentation. The triangles on either side of the central horizontal line represent the individuality that the craftsperson brings to the making process, the small differences which show that a given textile, although made within a recognisable cultural tradition, is nevertheless distinctive and can be identified with the craftsperson concerned. This is working with continuity in the cultural tradition. The work is both 'relative' and 'relational' in the sense that it relates to both the cultural tradition of which it is a part, and the style of making that is distinctive of the craftsperson.

The trajectory in Figure 2b represents change initiated from within. Here the craftsperson gives free reign to improvisations and innovations in the way he or she works with the tools and materials (the triangles either side of the central horizontal line), but this time allowing them to break away to produce

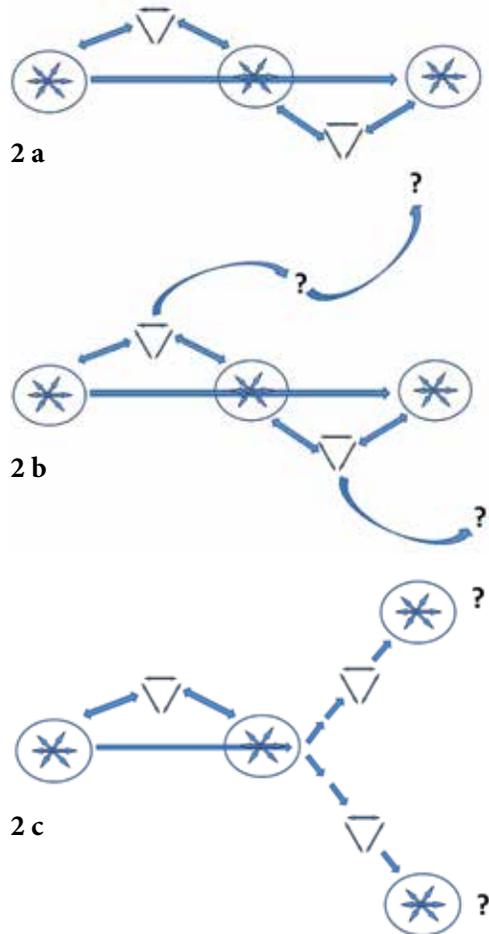


Figure 2 a, b, c. Continuity and change trajectories in craft practice. Figure by Patrick Dillon.

something that is recognisably different from the established tradition. The trajectory in Figure 2c represents change initiated from the outside, perhaps changed market conditions or changes in the availability of materials. The trajectory representing the tradition is broken and has ultimately to find a new direction. The craftsperson has to adapt to changed circumstances, again using his or her individual knowledge and skill (the small triangles above and below the central trajectory).

In practice, the factors operating to maintain continuity and the factors operating to initiate change are happening simultaneously. This is a restless dynamic: the potential interplay of all three scenarios depicted in the diagrams is ever present. The diagrams are a simplified theoretical device around which questions have been formulated about relative continuity and change in craft practice and a methodology devised to investigate them. Thus, the questions which this research seeks to investigate are: in comparative case studies of textile craft workers in three countries, Estonia, Cyprus and Peru:

- What are the enduring elements of the cultural traditions in which they are working?
- How are their own forms of creative expression challenging the traditions?
- What external factors are challenging/supporting their work with the traditions?

### **Methodology: data collection and analysis**

Craft practices are 'situated' in the cultural ecology and thus we used situational analysis to investigate the significant people-environment transactions in the cultural ecology. Our analysis covered the three fundamental elements of a 'given situation' proposed by Robson (1993): (i) the important aspects of the situation to those involved; (ii) the meaning these aspects have for those involved, and (iii) the effects they have on those involved. Situational analysis based on these elements identifies significant environmental characteristics and their relationships with the actors involved.

We sought to understand the wider cultural ecologies in which our research questions were located. Six craft practitioners, two in each of three countries, were interviewed by Kokko, yielding small scale case studies (e. g. Verschuren 2013) which acted as lenses for the cultural ecologies of crafts in the different contexts. The three countries and the practitioners were selected opportunistically, through the professional involvement of Kokko in funded craft-related projects and study visits. The three countries represented in the research each present specific social, cultural and

historical contexts for their textile traditions. Cyprus is a Mediterranean country and a member of the European Union (EU). Archaeological and historical records show it to have a long cultural history in which craft practices are significantly represented but the importance of crafts in present day society is declining (see Kokko, Kaipainen 2015). In Cyprus, *lefkaritiko* embroidery and traditional weaving are central to their textile traditions and carry much local symbolization (Hadjiyasemi 1987; Kokko, Kaipainen 2015; Papademetriou 2008; Papapetrou 2008). Estonia is a Nordic country, formerly part of the Soviet Union, now a member of the EU. Traditional craft practices were maintained during the Soviet period and have been revitalized as part of re-emergent Estonian identity (Parts 2015). Estonia has a rich textile culture and textile traditions involving many techniques which are an important part of its national identity (Kokko 2017; Jõeste, Ehin 2012; Parts 2015; Summatavet 2010). Peru is a South American country, formerly a colony of Spain. Its craft culture is central to the way of life of many people in rural areas (Joyce 2013; Silverman 2002) but has lost its relevance to most urban dwellers. Weaving and knitting are especially important in Peruvian textile traditions and each local community has its own symbolic expressions of them (Alvarez 2007; 2012).

The interviews in Cyprus were conducted in 2011 and 2012. The practitioners were part of a EU Lifelong Learning Programme 'Stitches and Threads – traditional textile handicraft in Cyprus' in which Kokko participated in 2011. This programme was created to help sustain and publicize the Cypriot textile traditions which are in danger of disappearing. The 2012 interviews were conducted by Kokko working with another researcher in a separate but related research project (see Kokko, Kaipainen 2015). The interviews in Estonia were conducted in 2014 and 2015 by Kokko with craft practitioners in the Viljandi Culture Academy through a bilateral exchange programme. This Estonian institute specializes in the cultural heritage of crafts as a contribution to sustaining Estonian national identity and traditions (Kokko 2017). The interviews in Peru were conducted in 2015 by Kokko as part of a study visit concerned with Andean textiles and culture. The study programme was created to offer both practical and theoretical knowledge of Andean textiles and culture to both Peruvian and international students. The practitioners interviewed were teachers in the study programme who represented the crafts practiced in the area. The interviews in Cyprus and Estonia were conducted in English. An English interpreter assisted in Peru where the interviews were made partly in Spanish.

Through the interviews, we sought to explore some of the key matters that characterized the cultural ecologies of the practitioners' craft practices.

The interviews were conducted in open format around a set of biographical and professional practice questions. The interviews took place in the practitioners' workshops or other convenient locations and each lasted about one hour. The practitioners were asked how they

- learned about crafts;
- developed their skills;
- made a living through their craft work;
- perceived the role of crafts in their culture.

During the research, photographs were taken and field notes made to provide supplementary contextual data about the local craft traditions in each country.

Transcripts of the interviews were broken down into a series of statements. The statements were categorized against the research questions and the interview questions. Emergent categories were also identified, i.e. statements that did not relate directly to the questions asked but nevertheless were deemed by the researchers to be relevant and worthy of further consideration. Groups of statements were refined into sub-categories which were used to structure the descriptive accounts that follow (Schreier 2014: 136–149; Willig 2014). Statements that dealt explicitly with matters of continuity and change were followed through by showing the practitioners a draft of the paper and asking them to clarify and/or elaborate certain matters. Idiosyncratic statements, which according to Taylor (1999), should not be dismissed, as they are a potentially important route into leading practitioners to reflect on and consider changes to the situations in which they are living and working, were also followed through. Responses were compared and contrasted and themes developed.

### **The practitioners and their biographical and professional contexts**

Listed below are the biographical and professional profiles of the practitioners, whose real names have been used with their permission. In each case, the practitioners have read the relevant content and agreed that it is a fair account of the interview dialogue.

#### **Rita**

Rita Charalambous, born in 1961, was interviewed in 2011.

Rita is a traditional *lefkaritiko* (see Hadjiyasemi 1987; Papademetriou 2008) embroiderer in Cyprus. *Lefkaritiko* (also called *lefkaritika* and Lefkara lace) is white embroidery with geometrical designs which has been



**Photo 1.** *Lefkaritiko* shops in Lefkara village in Cyprus. March 2011. Photo by Sirpa Kokko.

made for centuries by the women of the Lefkara village in the south of the country. Rita lives in a village where she has been practicing *lefkaritiko* since childhood (Photo 1). She runs her own shop where she sells her work and that of other *lefkaritiko* makers. Rita also has an income as a teacher of *lefkaritiko*.

Rita has not had a formal education in crafts. She was born in the culture of the *lefkaritiko* tradition which she learned from her mother and grandmother. She developed her skills by practicing the techniques over the years. Although it has been difficult to earn a living through selling these products, Rita has appreciated the possibility to combine her work with being a homemaker. She enjoys hands-on creation (Kokko, Kaipainen 2015).

### **Julia**

Julia Astreou, born in 1956, was interviewed in 2012.

Julia is a textile designer who specializes in woven textiles and works in the Cypriot tradition. She runs a big workshop in Nicosia where she sells her own products (Photo 2). Before this she worked for 21 years in the Cyprus Handicraft Service. She studied arts and textiles in France and has a B.A. Honours degree in Textiles/Fashion Design from a School of Art in England. Julia has conducted research on Cypriot traditional textiles and is actively involved in many aspects of textile crafts. In addition to selling her artefacts, Julia has other ways



**Photo 2.** The workshop of Julia Astreou. March 2011. *Photo by Sirpa Kokko.*

of earning an income: she teaches and lectures, writes books and catalogues, and has been a scientific consultant for films about traditional Cypriot crafts.

Two of Julia's aunts were weavers but her mother and grandmother were teachers. She thinks she had a natural inclination to be interested in crafts. At first, the weavers of the family did not support Julia's interest in weaving because she was educated and it was thought she would have other options for her future. From their own experience, they thought that weavers earned too little and this would not be a good choice for Julia.

### **Kristi**

Kristi Jõeste, born in 1977, was interviewed in 2014.

Kristi is an Estonian knitting master and textile artist who works in modern and traditional styles. She has had exhibitions in Estonia and around the world (Photo 3). She is doing research on knitted gloves and runs a company which produces them (Jõeste, Ehin 2012). She has an academic position at Viljandi Culture Academy (VCA) where she has taught traditional textile crafts, knitting, patchwork, crochet, weaving, embroidery and crocheting.

Kristi studied traditional textiles at VCA and has a Master's degree in semiotics from the University of Tartu. Crafts were not her first choice; she wanted to study theatre staging but it was not available that year. Now she cannot imagine life without textiles, especially knitting.



**Photo 3.** Kristi Jõeste's knitted gloves in an exhibition in Tallinn. November 2014. *Photo by Sirpa Kokko.*

Kristi's grandmother inspired her interest in textiles when she was very young. Her grandmother was always embroidering as well as knitting and her mother too was an example to her. Kristi tells about getting bored during the long school vacations but was curious about what her grandmother was doing and was taught some basic techniques. Kristi remembers knitting her first scarf for a doll at the age of 7. When Kristi went to school, she had lessons in craft education, but, she says, the teacher was not inspiring. She maintained her interest in crafts outside the school and as a teenager she was knitting jumpers herself.

Kristi employs 2–6 knitters in her company. Each of them manages to knit only 2–3 pairs of gloves per month because they have other occupations as well. Kristi says that, because knitting needs good skills which are time consuming, her company cannot grow.

### **Veinika**

Veinika Västriik, born in 1974, was interviewed in 2014.

Veinika is a contemporary and traditional Estonian weaver. She teaches weaving in Tartu Art College. Veinika weaves national skirts and belts and makes carpets but has limited time for this because of her teaching. With her brother's wife, Veinika has a web shop for selling weaving tools, materials and books. She also helps the weavers to put the warp on weaving looms and gives courses on various aspects of weaving (Photo 4).



**Photo 4.** Coloured warp on rep looms. *Photo by Veinika Västrik.*

Veinika fell in love with weaving in secondary school at the age of 16. She was part of the first generation of girls allowed to study home economics instead of military education; the boys still had to do military work. Later, Veinika found that it was possible to study weaving in Tartu, in the guild. She spent one year in the weaving room as a student where she was taught in return for helping the guild fulfil orders. She took part in a weaving course in Tallinn, where her teacher was a well-known Estonian textile designer who told her about the possibility of studying weaving as part of a special study programme at the University of Tartu. Before this, she had completed a BA in philology.

### **Apolonia**

Apolonia Coronel, born in 1952, was interviewed in 2015.

Apolonia is a traditional Peruvian weaver and teacher. Earlier, and together with her husband, she earned a living as a farmer. She has always made weavings for herself, enjoying the learning and making processes which give her a good feeling. She has never made craftwork for sale, only for personal use; she is happy to make something that is needed and functional. Most of her weaving motifs and designs come from her area of birth in Peru. She has a strong sense of attachment to this area and it is important to her to continue in the tradition of its craftwork.



**Photo 5.** Apolonia Coronel preparing a loom for her teaching, July 2015. *Photo by Sirpa Kokko.*

Apolonia's mother did not weave much and she learned from her only the basics. Apolonia learnt traditional weaving from the age of about 10 by observing other weavers at work while they were having conversations with her mother. She says that sometimes she stole a piece of woven textile from them and pulled it apart while she was out shepherding (mainly a child's occupation in Peru) to see how it was constructed; it took her many days to find out how it was made.

Apolonia had very little formal education; it was not available to her. Indeed, to get her basic education, she went to school at the age of 15 and even then against her father's will. By that time, she was so skilful in weaving that her school mates admired her work. Weaving was not taught at school.

Apolonia has been a teacher at Apulaya Center for Andean Culture for some years, and she likes to teach other people the things that nobody taught her (Photo 5). She says that she is always curious to learn; when she sees something new she wants to learn how to weave it. However, nowadays she no longer wants to make big woven things; she has a bad back and because of her age she gets tired easily. Now she is also looking for new inspirations from books.



**Photo 6.** Pedro Mendoza Mamani dyeing yarn with local plants. July 2015. *Photo by Sirpa Kokko.*

## **Pedro**

Pedro Mendoza Mamani, born 1985, was interviewed in 2015.

Pedro is a farmer and a traditional Peruvian knitter and weaver. He makes items for his personal use and for sale. Mainly he sells his artefacts in the local community owned shop in his home village. He teaches skills to interested people and thus gets some extra income. He learned to knit from his father and mother and local community members, picking up the skills as part of everyday life in his childhood.

Pedro has very little formal education; he only finished the second grade at primary school. But he knows how to use natural plants to dye the yarns, and he makes all his own traditional clothes (Photo 6).

Pedro is constantly making crafts; he is either concentrating on demanding tasks or making something less complicated alongside his other duties. When walking, sitting or discussing with others, he is at least making the knotted yarn which is used for knitting in men's caps 'chullos' (see Alvarez 2007) in his local area in Peru.

## **The practitioners and their craft practices**

In this section we report what the practitioners had to say in response to our questions about enduring elements of the cultural tradition in which they are working, how their own forms of creative expression are challenging

traditions, and the external factors that are influencing their work within the traditions.

### **Enduring elements in craft practices**

Cypriot textile traditions, especially weaving, form the source of inspiration of Julia's craft work, and she is committed to keeping the traditions alive. She has studied their forms and meanings in depth and written books which explain them. Anyone familiar with Cypriot textiles would recognize their influence on Julia's artefacts in which she uses traditional materials, colours, designs and symbols. Julia wants to gather the remaining information about local crafts by taking part in making a film (Papapetrou 2008) in which the old masters are interviewed and their working methods documented. However, she thinks that the traditions are best kept alive by developing them further and thus she uses old weaving techniques and designs as sources of information and inspiration which she incorporates into modern artefacts.

Kristi values cultural identity very highly and wants to show it by wearing textiles of Estonian origin. She has devoted herself to reconstructing Estonian styles of knitted mittens and gloves by making a rigorous study of them in the museums and archives. In addition to the reconstructions, she has developed the knitting traditions further. Kristi says that her own creations can be divided into three parts, of which the first two are enduring elements of the cultural tradition:

*The first is very traditional, when I make reconstructions I need to know what are the Estonian colours and the knitting technologies. The second part is a step further, then I use traditional knitting as a source of inspiration, I use maybe my own colours, when I knit. Maybe new ideas come out and I want to try those. This part of creation is still recognized as Estonian craft since I take care that I use the Estonian colours and so on.*

Kristi thinks that, ironically, the Soviet times (1940–1991) in Estonia were important for sustaining the Estonian crafts since there was a shortage of everything and people needed to make things themselves (see Parts 2015). It was also important in Estonia at that time to perpetuate certain traditions as symbols of cultural resistance.

Availability and accessibility of information is important to keeping a tradition alive. Veinika likes to study Estonian national weaving techniques. She thinks there is a need for some handbooks about the techniques and would like to write them. Her mission is to be able to combine research and practical craftwork.

Apolonia would like to learn more about the meanings of the weaving designs, but says that it is not easy to get this information. To some extent, the meanings of the motifs have been lost over time. Apolonia says that weaving demands a lot of mathematic skill in addition to manual skill. The construction of Andean textiles incorporates a kind of Andean mathematics, the symbolism is a way of passing on information independently of writing.

The importance and need for education about craft traditions was raised by the practitioners. Crafts as a discrete subject are not part of the formal school system in Cyprus, nor in Peru, but they are taught in Estonia. In Cyprus, some teachers take their pupils to visit Julia's workshop. Julia has noticed:

*They wear clothes but they don't really know how the clothes are made, what are the raw materials. And these things fascinate them, and also the teachers feel that this is something that they should learn. Because for our age, it is common knowledge, but for a kid of 10 years old, it is something they don't know.*

She thinks that, in the education sector, it should be realized that handicrafts are part of the culture to be learned. Julia feels that the continuous changes in culture, society and lifestyle should be reflected in artistic craft making. She has observed that most Cypriots do not perceive weaving as an art form. According to her, some people in Cyprus do use traditional weaving but most of them lack good training and thus they have limited capabilities for doing artistically designed weaving.

Crafts are not part of the formal curriculum in Peru and thus those who leave their home area lose the opportunity to learn the craft traditions of their communities. Those who stay in the communities rather than going to school in the towns lose the possibility of a better education but they learn to weave and even reach levels of excellence. Only a few manage to combine schooling with localised expertise in craft making. Apolonia's granddaughter, whom Apolonia has taught, is the only one in her classroom who knows weaving.

In Estonia, crafts are part of a comprehensive educational program which Kristi thinks guarantees that everyone gets to know at least the basic things. She has noticed that whereas many people have only limited skills, increasing numbers would like to have a better understanding of craft traditions. Kristi gives courses on knitting outside of her daily work and she cannot meet the demand from people who are interested in learning more. Her students are Estonians from different age groups for whom national identity, and its representation in crafts, is important. Kristi is also teaching some knitters to work in her company to produce the knitted mittens and gloves that she has designed – a form of apprenticeship. The gloves that blend traditional styles with new designs are complicated to make and the knitters need more

professional skills. Kristi says that teaching the traditional forms of Estonian knitting is her mission.

These examples reveal the importance of practitioner know-how in its cultural context in sustaining living craft traditions. Collecting information, teaching skills, and education, specifically about local significance and generally about global heritage, are all part of maintaining and renewing traditions. The Cypriot and Estonian interviewees in this study have devoted themselves to high level technical mastery and deep understandings of the cultural meanings of their craft practices. They are willing to use their expertise in disseminating practitioner knowledge through teaching and publication. Whereas inter-generational transmission of skill has been important in maintaining Peruvian craft traditions, its practitioners have had fewer opportunities for developing arguments for its heritage value. The case studies offer a mixed vision of the future. Of the three countries studied, only Estonia has the suggestion of a sufficiently robust educational/heritage infrastructure. In Cyprus and Peru continuity may ultimately depend on the vagaries of the tourist economy.

### **Creative expression and challenging the tradition**

In Cyprus, traditional textiles are not inhibiting to Julia's own designs but rather a source of information and inspiration for her. She has developed her own artistic approach to traditional techniques and is producing woven contemporary artefacts. She appreciates high quality craftwork which, she says, is the main thing for her. She thinks that to keep a tradition alive, it is important to develop it further. This view is connected to the changing tastes of contemporary customers. Also, she wants to express her artistic views in the textiles that she is making.

Kristi is taking a lot of liberties when using the tradition as a source of inspiration. She uses artistic freedom to reflect her deep love of Estonian cultural heritage:

*There is a link between my creation and the traditional source. If you don't know anything about it, you can't tell anymore where I have taken the inspiration from. You don't know, I need to tell you. Otherwise you may think that 'oh very beautiful gloves'. Still I keep the good quality of work and materials and use traditional tools, but the style of the gloves is very original or artistic and is still inspired by the Estonian traditions.*

Veinika thinks that nowadays she has a more artistic approach in the way she teaches weaving. She has specialized in rep weaving which is warp faced weaving where the warp threads are put so close together that no weft is visible. She weaves carpets with her own patterns getting the inspiration from traditional

sources. For example, she changes the colours, using black and white which are nowadays more appropriate than the traditional colours. She uses old patterns, but changes the details. She is looking for something new, more minimalistic and enjoys experimenting and creating new designs. She is both enjoying the artistic freedom and thinking about the expectations of prospective customers.

Although Apolonia and Pedro follow local patterns and techniques, they also improvise their own designs. They may change the colour or a pattern according to the personal tastes or ideas that occur during the moment of making. In this way they combine local traditions with personal identities, which is typical for Andean crafts (see Alvarez 2007; 2012) which manage to keep their origins but also change and stay alive.

Of the informants in this study, those who had had opportunities to further their studies on crafts in higher education (Julia, Kristi and Veinika), were keen to develop their own artistic approaches to craft traditions. They valued both the high-quality craftsmanship and the artistic expression in their work. They were helping to maintain the idea of tradition generally while moving it in specific new directions. In the countries we studied, there are other examples of practitioners whose creative work is challenging traditions. In Peru, Máximo Laura is a textile artist who has used Andean culture and textile traditions as a source for his own artistic expressions and innovations. His tapestry work is nourished with the symbols, stories, traditions and iconic meanings of his Peruvian origins which he is expressing in new ways. He is also utilizing contemporary technology and tools to express the voice of his ancient culture (Caskins 2013). In Estonia, Anu Raud has used Estonian traditional textiles and their symbols in new ways in her tapestry work. Her artistic expression cherishes Estonian culture and expresses her deep affection for it (Reinholm 2013).

There has been much debate over differences between crafts, which for some represent relics of the past with little inherent creative potential, and arts, which typically offer possibilities for free expression and innovation (Ihatsu 2002). The textile practitioners of this study show that it is possible to challenge tradition by using it as a source of artistic expression in ways that both sustains the broader heritage from which it is derived whilst taking the expression of the tradition in new directions.

### **External factors influencing textile traditions**

There are many external factors affecting the choices made by the practitioners and their activities. The interviews reveal that economic circumstances have a pivotal effect on craft making. Since craft making demands plenty of time and care, it is difficult for the artefacts to compete with cheap mass produced products.

In Cyprus, Rita was very pessimistic about the future of *lefkaritiko* and craft making generally. She says:

*There is about 50–56 ladies left in the village who are doing this as work, the others don't do that. And the young ones, nobody. It is dying out, let's say 20 years maximum.*

Julia thinks that at the moment crafts are appreciated but there is competition between handmade quality crafts and imported products. At the time of her interview, there was an economic crisis in Cyprus which led to increased unemployment and less disposable income for buying crafts. She said that most Cypriot weavers are rather old and there is a risk of losing the tradition since the young people choose to concentrate on other things:

*Weaving, it is almost gone. In Lefkara even the embroidery. Some young girls know, but they cannot earn a living from that.*

In Estonia, Kristi raised the issue of the danger of losing the tradition with the passing of the older generation of craft makers:

*There are no more masters from whom you could learn. Maybe only in Kihnu island there are old ladies who know how to knit. They have learned their skills from their mothers. (See also Parts 2015; Summatavet 2010.)*

Veinika says that it is really hard to earn a living with crafts because making them takes so much time. Also prices are rising, and very few Estonians can afford to buy handmade crafts.

Kristi says that those Estonians who buy her work are typically from middle class backgrounds and have a strong sense of culture. Most of the gloves she had made in the year of the interview were sold abroad. She says that it is not possible to sell her gloves in the shops in Tallinn because of the high commission these places take to cover their expenses. According to her, there are many small scale craft activists in Estonia who have chosen this occupation as a lifestyle, which means a modest life economically but freedom to do the things they love. Also, craft making is a popular hobby in Estonia and thus forms an important part of people's wellbeing.

Globalisation processes have affected people's lives even in remote areas of Peru. Apolonia tells about the influence of western values; she is pessimistic about the future of the Andean culture since people want to be urban with a 'western' lifestyle. Many countrymen want their children to get an education and live in a city, which they consider better for them. This is exacerbated by the educational system: in the mountains of Peru there are either no local schools or if they do exist they are not very good, so children are sent to

school in towns where they adopt urban values. Pedro says that increasingly Peruvians wear western style clothes in their everyday life, especially in urban areas, less people dress like him and Apolonia in clothes which represent their cultural roots.

Some external factors may also sustain craft traditions. The ever increasing interest in craft traditions and craft making is also part of the globalisation processes. The practitioners noticed a growing willingness of people from their own countries and from abroad to learn to make the traditional crafts. Kristi is also teaching knitting to foreigners:

*Somehow it is very popular, people all around the world come to Estonia. Now there is a new form of tourism called craft tourism. They learn from the Estonian masters like us and they go back home and Estonian craft is famous now.*

Veinika thinks that people are increasingly less happy with consumerism and would prefer to make something with their own hands, even if they can afford to buy the craft products made by others. Also Julia has noticed the demand for more craft workshops. She tries to satisfy this alongside her many other activities in Cyprus. Apolonia and Pedro are frequently giving workshops on traditional Andean textiles for both Peruvians and foreigners. Craft courses are one aspect of the tourism industry in the Andes.

Some practitioners, Julia, Kristi and Veinika, are utilising the possibilities offered by the internet and social media in their craft business to access clients and to advertise their work. They have noticed the potential and are keen to reach both local and international audiences with these tools. Pedro and Apolonia are not familiar with the internet and are not advertising their craft work or services themselves. However, their employers advertise the courses they teach on their websites and in social media such as Facebook.

Governmental and other official policies were perceived to be important in supporting crafts. Rita mentioned the role of UNESCO in protecting and thus showing its value. In Estonia, the large number of museums, where craft traditions can be explored and knowledge gained, is seen as an important factor in sustaining the crafts.

In summary, globalization, urbanization and associated technological changes, especially their impact on the markets for goods and labour, are perceived as the most significant threats to the continuity of textile traditions. There are counterforces: more people are making choices in their consumer behaviour which recognize and value the tradition and heritage embodied in handmade products. Also, there is a small but growing interest in people making things by their own hands, leading to more demand for information and education.

### Discussion: Crafts as expressions of place and identity

Traditional cultural environments have characteristics that align well with the dimensions of 'place attachment' and 'place identity' identified by Gustafson (2001) and developed and extended by Dillon et al. (2015). The dimensions are: (i) opportunities or challenges provided by the affordances of the environment; (ii) membership or co-operation in places/spaces; (iii) place-specific activities; and (iv) a sense of restoration, recreation, or relaxation in a place. These dimensions overlap, and out of their intersections emerge a number of more specific qualities, e.g. a sense of belonging, pride, inspiration, matters which are very evident in our interviews.

These characteristics reveal that the craft practitioners express their identities in specific places to which they are strongly attached. These attachments powerfully influence continuity in the craft traditions. Dressing is one way of representing a sense of belonging such as in Peru, where both Apolonia and Pedro feel secure wearing their local costumes. Apolonia always wears the dresses from her own birth area (Photo 5). It is important to her that not only the dresses but also the textiles from which she makes them show where she comes from. It is important for Pedro to use the traditional patterns of his local area in his craftwork and in his clothes because this represents his Andean identity (Photo 6). He is proud to always wear the traditional costumes which he makes himself. His chullos and ponchos are decorated in the traditional Andean way (see Alvarez 2007; 2012). In Estonia, Kristi is often wearing clothes that have Estonian connotations. In Cyprus, Rita wants to keep the *lefkaritiko* craft close to its origins. She is proud of the high quality embroidery work which is made with the traditional materials and natural colours (see Hadjiyiasemi 1987; Papademetriou 2008). This original form of *lefkaritiko* is the only one that she will accept and make to sell in her shop.

In Peru, craft practice reinforces bonds between place, identity and social cohesion. Especially in the rural areas, people gather together to weave, knit and use natural dyes, and they help each other. These connections are still strong and, as in many other cultures, it is possible to identify where someone comes from by the patterns they use in their textiles. Clothing is a visible way to express one's identity, nationally and locally (Eicher 1995). In Peru, dresses are decorated by distinctive local patterns that show clearly the origin of a person wearing them (Alvarez 2007; Lewis 2015). In Estonia, traditional crafts are very popular and all Kristi's courses on Estonian knitting are well subscribed. Apolonia and Pedro use natural dyes sourced locally (Photo 6). In Pedro's village they sell their products in the local community owned craft shop. In Lefkara village in Cyprus the older women share the knowledge of

*lefkaritiko* making. Rita identifies with her local village by continuing the traditional embroidery practiced there (Photo 1).

However, in the lifetime of all of the practitioners we interviewed, the communities in which they are members, along with their embedded traditions, have been influenced profoundly by external factors, in particular, economic pressures coming from consumers whose networks are independent of space, variable in duration, and have different rules for entry and participation. These networks are associated with tourism, the Internet and social media. The interrelated processes of globalisation and technological change are the dominant agents of change (see Kokko, Dillon 2016).

The responses of the three countries to these pressures have been varied and are linked to factors associated with cultural resilience, e.g. (i) enduring beliefs in the tradition and the value put on it within the society which, in turn, connects with education and (ii) the opportunity cost of pursuing traditional work relative to what might be earned in other occupations, assuming there is access to them, which, in turn, links to the general economic circumstances of the country concerned. Some of these factors, e.g. enduring beliefs, are likely to lead to responses to change initiated from within, typical of the trajectory depicted in Figure 2b; others are external, primarily economic, and are likely to give rise to the trajectory depicted in Figure 2c.

### **Conclusion: Crafts as cultural ecologically located practice**

Cultural ecology, with its emphasis on the ever changing transactional relationships between people and the environments they inhabit, provides a lens on the processes of continuity and change, the restless dynamic, that shape cultural patterns and cultural traditions. The interviews reported in this research reveal something of the complex sets of transactions that comprise the respective cultural traditions in which the work of the six craft practitioners is situated. Having interviewed only two people from each country, we cannot claim to have representative samples of textile makers, let alone craft practitioners. However, generalisations are possible which, when cast against the research literature, reveal some pertinent issues.

Some common factors emerge across the case studies which profoundly shape the cultural ecologies. They are: (i) the transmission of customs, beliefs and values from generation to generation, located within (ii) a place of social interaction which confers a sense of belonging, through which (iii) the qualities of individuals can be expressed and social identities formed. These interrelationships are shown in Figure 3, which may also be regarded as an elaboration of the generalized cultural tradition depicted in the oval shapes enclosing stars in Figure 2.

Viewed in the longer term, textile making in all three countries has developed in 'strong' traditional communities, i.e. communities with clearly defined boundaries and coherent internal dynamics governing their development, structure, stability and the ways in which they respond to external influences. In all three countries, these strong community characteristics have contributed to distinctive craft practices and products. The developmental

trajectories, until recently, would have followed the one represented in Figure 2a. The values of the craftspeople concerned were formed, developed, refined and revised within a well-defined niche. Craft artefacts have changed in response to these values; they were modified slowly and incrementally as the prescriptive knowledge of the practitioners co-evolved with the situations in which the artefacts they made were used (Howe, Dillon 2001).

Techniques are the fundamental units of the prescriptive knowledge embodied in traditional craft making. Techniques, and associated understandings of materials, patterns, colours and other design elements, can be taught, imitated, and communicated but are never 'complete': judgement, dexterity, experience and other forms of tacit knowledge means there is always scope to improve or adapt a craft artefact 'from within' (the trajectory in Figure 2b) or in response to some external pressures (the trajectory in Figure 2c). A major addition to prescriptive knowledge is an invention, but the vast majority of changes are small and incremental, they are renovations.

Technology has an ambiguous role. On the one hand, global trends increase the tendency to reduce prescriptive knowledge to sets of executable instructions, recipes or routines, and to apply them in technologically driven processes of production. Mass produced goods from elsewhere compete with local crafts. On the other hand, technology offers the possibility of experimentation and 'subtle subversion' from within (Niedderer 2009).

Education too can be an ambiguous influence. There is no formal craft education in Peru; crafts are taught as part of a daily life in the villages. If a child goes to school, he/she may have to leave home and thus lose the possibility

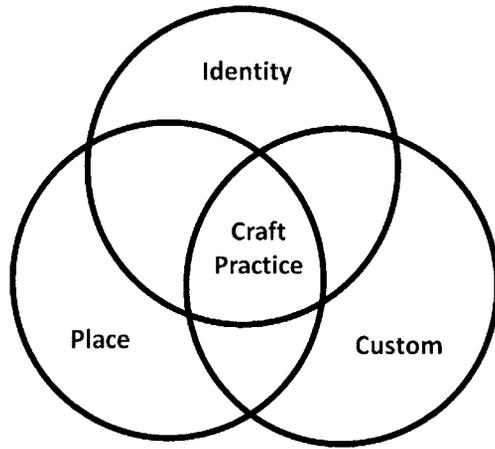


Figure 3. Craft practice and its location in the defining elements of cultural tradition. *Figure by Patrick Dillon.*

of learning crafts. In Cyprus crafts are not part of the curriculum as a discrete subject: without renewal there is a danger that they will fade away. The irony here is that Cyprus is part of the EU where there are transnational and national policies for the protection of cultural heritage and associated craft traditions. However, the interrelationships between beliefs and education are complex. One issue that emerged from the interviews is the status of craft knowledge and how it is valued (see Niedderer, Townsend 2013). In educational systems, globally, the trend is that knowledge is valued in society when it is deemed to be economically 'useful'. This exacerbates the long-standing distinction between episteme, the propositional knowledge which underpins globalised service economies, and techne or prescriptive knowledge of craft practice. The counterforce is that crafts may also be valued for their effect on wellbeing, but this does not sit well with the testing and measurement culture that currently permeates educational systems.

Although these policies are framed around 'knowledge resources' and 'economic enterprises', especially as they relate to their value to tourism, the connections between formal education, intangible heritage and tourist economies are seldom made. In Estonia, craft traditions are appreciated as a way of strengthening national identity and are taught in comprehensive schools. There are some possibilities to get further education in arts and crafts, such as a special study programme at the University of Tartu (Kokko 2017).

Globalisation can lead to such fundamental changes in the economy of a country that crafts may be swept away. This may be the situation in Cyprus. Alternatively, they may survive as an adjunct to tourism, as in Peru, where the situation of traditional crafts mirrors what is happening with the country's archaeological heritage:

*... [the] past is converted into a vast tourist project, contradictory, negotiated, and contested relationships are played out in a constantly changing drama, with ruins, indigenous people, ordinary city residents, foreign tourists, the Peruvian government, and the private sector as the actors (Silverman 2002).*

Of the three countries we studied, only in Estonia is there evidence that crafts are valued in their own terms as part of a national identity: traditions are maintained, renewed and developed.

In this paper, cultural ecology has been used to frame a transactional approach to textile craft making in three different national contexts. Transactions operate through 'markets', and markets, broadly defined, encompass the exchange of information, ideas, techniques and processes as well as products. Market transactions are both a mechanism that maintains continuity and a powerful agent of change in a cultural ecology. The flux between

continuity and change, tradition and innovation, is evident in all three of the counties studied. There are some commonalities between the three counties in the cultural ecologies of textile craft making and some elements that are culturally specific.

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