

# **Crafting Futures Central Asia**

## **Kyrgyzstan Pilot Project Report**

### **Inter-Generational Craft Communication and Collective Craft Futures**

#### **Introduction**

RCA School of Communication researchers and practitioners Tom Simmons and Eleanor Dare visited Kyrgyzstan between 25 February and 5 March 2020, co-leading five days of workshops with Kyrgyz crafts leaders and practitioners in the capital Bishkek, the North-Eastern area of Lake Issyk-Kul and the Southern city of Osh as part of a pilot project for the Crafting Futures Central Asia programme.

The focus, scope and methodology of the project were developed with local organisations, crafts people and leaders including the Central Asia Crafts Support Association's Resource Centre in Kyrgyzstan (CACSARC) led by Dinara Chochunbaeva, Oksana Kononova and Iskender Osmoev; British Council teams in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan led by Galina Koretskaya and Kairat Ospanov; staff and students of Osh State University; videographers Malika Autalipova and Timur Nusimbekov of AdamDAR; and translators Iskender Osmoev, Clarissa Mavlyanova and Anara Kadyrbaeva.

The project was informed by a scoping visit undertaken in November 2019, during which initial investigations, discussions with c. 120 Kyrgyz craft practitioners, leaders and experts, and collaborative information sharing about craft, its cultural, economic and educational contexts in Kyrgyzstan and relationships with other parts of the world were undertaken. Many of the people we met during the visit articulated a desire to develop skills associated with communication and collaboration, enhance networks, and exchange ideas for the future of crafts in Kyrgyzstan.

The main outcomes from the scoping visit, based on key themes identified by/with Kyrgyz crafts leaders, practitioners, teachers, researchers, students, entrepreneurs and public officials were:

1	There is an opportunity to develop the narrative of craft in Kyrgyzstan so that its complexity, historical importance and skill can be made more visible and be conveyed to relevant audiences, such that craft can achieve a value that reflects the work, skill and concerns involved in its production.
2	There is a need, identified by the crafts leaders and practitioners we met, to support regional and inter-regional discussions, roundtables and symposia in Kyrgyzstan to deepen research, share knowledge and concerns, and collectively clarify and consolidate the Crafting Futures agenda.
3	Suggestions for future activities that might be supported by Crafting Futures include: peer support and idea exchange workshops; global exchange activities and mechanisms; inter-generational networking, knowledge and experience sharing; craft camps and craft assemblies, for example at the Yurt Camp on the Southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul.
4	Many craft practitioners we met said they have skills gaps in practical areas of craft communication, such as filmmaking, animation, photography and storytelling, as well as in core business practices relating to the development of sustainable livelihoods in current day Kyrgyzstan.
5	We were also told there is an opportunity to help strengthen craft communication networks and connections with related sectors including education, culture, heritage and tourism in Kyrgyzstan, to promote the excellence of craft in, across and beyond the region, and to preserve and document practice while promoting innovation.
6	The integration of craft into a coherent educational curriculum would be worthy of further exploration, though we did not feel it is a realistic goal for this project.

During the pilot project, three workshops were developed and held in urban and rural locations to further explore the key themes that were discussed during the scoping visit. The workshops involved crafts leaders, practitioners, teachers, researchers, students, policy makers, public officials and entrepreneurs from across the country with expertise in diverse areas of practice including textiles, leatherwork, woodwork, yurt making, jewellery, performance, animation and media, and related areas of education, tourism and policy making.

The workshops focused on sharing, mapping and communicating key issues for sustainable craft practice in Kyrgyzstan through intergenerational and intercultural exchange, storytelling and filmmaking. They were based on a ground-up, collaborative and de/post-colonial action-research model involving co-learning and critically reflective forms of listening, sharing, making and documenting. Through ongoing discussions with the individuals and organisations involved in the project, our approach responded to creative, social, political and epistemological concerns associated with researching with and supporting Kyrgyz crafts practitioners, particularly in relation to communication needs and skills. The main aims of the pilot project were to:

1	Collaboratively deepen knowledge of key issues identified by/with craftspeople and crafts leaders in Kyrgyzstan (including those relating to inter-regional and international concerns and opportunities).
2	Collaboratively develop a de/post-colonial, culturally based and intersectional research methodology to support collective action in the region/inter-regionally, and co-create approaches for addressing issues that had been identified through the scoping visit, in particular around formats/methods for peer support and exchange, intergenerational storytelling and communication, sustainable business development, and mechanisms for consolidating and enhancing the visibility of (and access to) information about Kyrgyz crafts practice.

As a recap, the overarching premise of the Crafting Futures Central Asia programme is that:

*Through international collaboration, Crafting Futures creates new networks and opportunities for shared learning between the UK and other countries around the globe. The programme supports research and education in craft, ensuring our projects are relevant and the quality of creative practice is preserved and continues to develop. Crafting Futures offers designers and artisans access to knowledge and expertise, new markets and new audiences, ensuring the value of craft is appreciated more broadly and knowledge can continue to be shared within the sector. (British Council, 2020)*

At the centre of our collective research practice for Crafting Futures is the imperative of countering and moving beyond the colonial assumptions of our shared heritage, our institutions and specifically our home country, the UK. We are also mindful of the need to collectively identify and address power imbalances that can be found within intercultural research, particularly when such research is undertaken with and funded by large cultural institutions. We are reminded, for example by Paul Cooke and Inés Soria-Donlan, of the British Council's interests in promoting cultural and economic values, languages and international cooperation as a form of soft power through 'sharing knowledge and expertise' (Cooke and Soria-Donlan, 2018; Dubber and Donaldson, 2015).

In their writing, Cooke and Soria-Donlan also refer to the work of Annie Sloman to highlight calls for 'community decision-making which transfers the 'balance of power away from the idea of "power over", to "power to", "power with", and "power with-in"' (Cooke and Soria-Donlan, 2018; Sloman, 2011). In our approach to the Crafting Futures programme we are endeavouring to integrate these concerns into the decolonial practices we are developing within the project, while acknowledging the implications and limitations of our own roles. Soft forms of power and their entanglements with identity, communication and craft narratives are a critical factor in the research we have been involved with, and we have seen them as a key part of the social, political, material and epistemological contexts within which our project has evolved. The growth of a market economy in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has similarly been a major factor in our discussions with Kyrgyz craft leaders and practitioners, along with its effects on individual and collective lives.

Acknowledging these complex geopolitical factors, the approach we have established with Kyrgyz craft practitioners and leaders aims to develop open, critically reflexive and responsible forms of research and engagement that take into consideration the interconnected material, social, political, ethical and relational factors that shape intercultural dialogue and exchange. This is particularly important in the context of undertaking research that aims to support collective learning, help preserve practices considered to be at risk, and explore changing contexts for sustainable craft livelihoods in Kyrgyzstan. As acknowledged above, it is even more crucial as our research is funded by and contributes to craft initiatives involving Kyrgyz and British organisations and institutions operating on multiple scales alongside individual craft practitioners, students, teachers and their families. Similarly, our intention is to develop collaborative approaches that emphasise material engagement, the exploration of planetary connections, tacit and embodied knowledge, alongside its articulation and translation in spoken and written languages (Kyrgyz, Russian and English). We are specifically concerned with counteracting the creation of knowledge hierarchies during our research, and understanding challenges associated with and relating to representation. This has informed our methodology as articulated below.

## Methodology

RCA researchers Tom Simmons and Eleanor Dare share a UK based research provenance and culture, coming from a country with a colonial past, in which inequitable power relations and exploitation were, and arguably continue to be, a key factor in its wealth. Many of the social, political and material assumptions entangled in that heritage are still prevalent in relationships with other countries and in everyday and institutional relations and networks. We are conscious, therefore, of the need to observe ourselves and the organisations we are working with in the act of research, to bring a sharp consciousness to bear on how we frame our own intentions and knowledges when undertaking research, and also on how the knowledges and rights of everyone involved in the research we undertake are framed and respected. As Appadurai (2006) states, research risks remaining an elite process:

*normally seen as a high-end, technical activity, available by training and class background to specialists in education, the sciences and related professional fields. It is rarely seen as a capacity with democratic potential, much less as belonging to the family of rights.*  
Appadurai (2006)

We have found the ideas of De Santos (2018, 2016) and Appadurai (2006), useful in bringing mindfulness to the assumptions, power relations and biases of our British backgrounds, the idea of *Knowing With* (de Sousa Santos, 2018, 15) not *knowing about*, has informed the way we have designed, framed and run the workshops and discussions described in this report. This has been particularly important in developing shared experiences, languages, agendas, methods and resources for our research, and also in establishing collaborative approaches that are critical of hegemonic, hierarchical and exploitative approaches. Our methodology is premised on co-examining the material, epistemological and political dimensions of intercultural research involving Kyrgyz and British researchers, craft and communication practitioners, so as



to offer a genuine attempt to support grassroots, collective action and solidarity, sharing and learning. We also aim to prioritise the *Right to Research* (Appadurai, 2006) for all those we have worked with, as articulated by Appadurai,

*that among the rights that this group is capable of claiming—and ought to claim—is the right to research. By this I mean the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens. (Appadurai, 2006)*

At the same time, we are acutely aware of the dangers of idealising our own methodology and the construct of participatory practice as described by Mattern (2020), in this example, in relation to disingenuous community building projects: “The community” invited to participate has reason to be sceptical, especially when the invitation comes from a commercial developer with money to gain and data to harvest” (Mattern, 2020). We were anxious, therefore, not to frame the actions and discussions we developed as ‘data’ to be harvested, but as knowledge to be created with, and primarily for, Kyrgyz craft practitioners, researchers, teachers, students and others.

We were keen to co-learn, both contextually and methodologically, from existing studies undertaken in Kyrgyzstan, such as Mohira Suyarkulova’s research on challenging hierarchies in collaborative fieldwork in Central Asia (Suyarkulova, 2018) and investigations of Kyrgyz narratives in contemporary media, design and fashion (Suyarkulova, 2016); the extensive research on the history and contemporary practice of Kyrgyz crafts undertaken by Dinara Chochunbaeva, Jenishgul Ozbekova, Aziza Okeeva and their colleagues (e.g. Chochunbaeva, Ozbekova & Okeeva et al, 2015; Chochunbaeva, 2010); methodological experiences documented by Aida Abdykanova, Kubatbek Tabaldiev, Asipa Zhumbaeva and Anne Pyburn in their *Grassroots Resource Preservation and Management in Kyrgyzstan* project (Abdykanova, Tabaldiev, Zhumbaeva & Pyburn, 2016); Aisalkyn Botoeva and Regine Spector’s research on craft-based apparel producers in contemporary Kyrgyzstan (Botoeva & Spector, 2013); and also from research focused on Central Asian crafts involving British academics, including Emma Dicks’ writing on textiles, identity value and visibility (Dick, 2018). We drew on these bodies of research when developing collaborative approaches in the pilot project with the aim of upholding respect for local knowledges and contributing to ongoing discussions and processes initiated and led by and/or with Kyrgyz crafts practitioners, leaders and policy-makers.

We concur with de Sousa Santos, that although we are in no way against science:

*The scientific knowledge that brought us here will not be able to get us out of here, we need other knowledges, we need other conceptions of time, we need other conceptions of productivity, we need other conceptions of spatial scale. I have focused on the ecology of knowledges, on the need to bring together different kinds of knowledges. Scientific knowledge with popular vernacular knowledge and other non-scientific ways of knowing, artistic knowledge, performative knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2016)*

We (as well as the School of Communication at the RCA within which we are employed) are concerned with communication practice and research, and are wary of the datafication of subjectivity within the context of our role in this project. We do not see our role as supporting the reduction of embodied actions and lived experiences to numeric units. We were often told by people in Kyrgyzstan of other projects in the country which replicated previous work over and over again, or worse, projects which offered resources, such as technologies, without the support to make use of them. We were wary of the potential for the research to unfold as an exploitative, hierarchical or self-serving practice, and not one focused on a meaningful shared legacy created by, with and for the crafts people we collaborated with and their wider communities.

However, in practice, we found that establishing a decolonial intercultural position was challenging, both in terms of connecting equitably with lived experiences and in establishing shared understandings and vocabularies (particularly for anyone who is not familiar with scholarly terms such as 'decolonial', 'intersectional' or 'abyssal'). However, with the help of local partners we were able to engage exceptionally talented, experienced and specialist Kyrgyz and Russian translators who helped us find ways to discuss, frame, explore and develop these concepts during the workshops we held.

A decolonial methodology embracing grassroots action, collaborative research, exchange and learning engenders additional layers of complexity within a Central Asian, Post-Soviet and intercultural context, such that we realised it is by critically reflective practice and conduct that our methodology is effectively evinced, not through academic jargon or abstractions. From this perspective we found the relational and political critiques of regional and post-development approaches developed by Kiran Asher and Joel Wainwright (Asher and Wainwright, 2018) particularly helpful. However, the disgust that Nature has been 'turned by the epistemologies of the North into an infinitely available resource' and *exploited to its exhaustion* (de Sousa Santos, 2016) was so often alluded to by the Kyrgyz craftspeople we worked with, it was clear they had (and have) deep insights into the impact of colonial extractivism, without necessarily echoing our own academic vocabulary or an explicitly political position.

During the workshops it became apparent from discussions with our translators, that certain concepts we had used in our presentations were not easily translatable into Kyrgyz, for example we were advised that the word 'letter' made more sense than 'message' in the context of identifying and communicating 'messages' based on contemporary concerns and future visions for craft practice. As a result, through discussions with the crafts leaders and crafts people we worked with, alongside our own ongoing critical reflection, we modified the emphasis of many aspects of the workshops as the research took place. As previously stated, other terms such as 'decolonial' and 'intersectional' were also hard to translate. We again modified our approach so as to explain our own context and positions as British researchers striving to avoid replicating our own colonial heritage in our research approach and focus. Another word we found did not readily translate into Kyrgyz was 'object', which we meant as an item of craft, such as a rug or hat - instead through discussion with translators and craft practitioners we used the words 'craft item', for example to convey the theme of making a craft item *speak* in one of our workshop activities.

## Workshops

Through the three inter-generational film-making and storytelling workshops we ran during the pilot project the depth of knowledge, life-long research and insight into craft practice, sustainability and materiality that was brought to the project was vividly documented. Key to this approach was developing critically reflective forms of collaboration, acknowledging, embracing and exploring the differing perspectives, ideas and concerns of the individuals, groups and organisations we worked with. Many of the individuals we met during the scoping visit we undertook in November were also involved in the pilot project workshops.

### Workshop 1, Bishkek

The first workshop was held in a vocational college in Bishkek and took place over one day. The workshop was attended by 28 craft leaders and craft practitioners with an equal balance of men and women, and with a breadth of skills and experiences. The group included craft makers, media and communication experts alongside first- and second-year college students, policy makers, public officials, teachers and craft leaders. We opened the workshop by presenting the report we wrote after the scoping visit we undertook in November. We received positive feedback on the report and were told it accurately reflected the priorities and concerns of craftspeople we had worked with. With support from Dinara Chochunbaeva, workshop participants formed small intergenerational groups guided by common interests and languages to map and articulate key issues relating to crafts in Kyrgyzstan. Key themes arising from the mapping of craft issues undertaken during the morning part of the workshop included:

1	Developing a 'Made in Kyrgyzstan' campaign and/or a series of animations to raise awareness of the quality of Kyrgyz crafts and culture.
2	Developing a methodology to support educational provision in schools for disabled children.
3	Developing policies to: raise awareness of the contemporary value of traditional cultures and knowledges; support quality standards in craft practices; enhance global impact; preserve traditional and regional aesthetics, forms and meanings.
4	Gaps in understanding of international markets.
5	Developing effective networks.
6	Challenges and cost implications for logistics and transportation routes for exporting craft products.
7	A suggestion that the Crafts Union of Kyrgyzstan could become the tool for all Kyrgyz craftspeople to promote and sell their products.
8	Supporting craftswomen's involvement in networking, professional and vocational education, and in developing storytelling about craft products with young creative people.

<b>9</b>	A lack of leadership skills is a key issue - the overall number of leaders is very small; existing / local leaders could rapidly share their knowledge with younger generations.
<b>10</b>	Involving craftspeople in creating a Central Asian Crafts Collection, supporting leadership development and promoting practice on different platforms.
<b>11</b>	Developing storytelling on a more professional level, also training on pricing products.
<b>12</b>	A lack of infrastructure, regulation and ensuring the supply of and access to raw materials
<b>13</b>	Opportunities to develop crafts festivals in Kyrgyzstan learning from experiences elsewhere e.g. Mongolia
<b>14</b>	Challenges of linking the private sector with government.
<b>15</b>	Opportunities for collaboration include developing craft focused legislation. This could draw on experiences in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and include research to collect data and statistics on crafts.
<b>16</b>	Government-led development of a handicrafts museum.
<b>17</b>	Establishing communication/collaboration between government and all the initiatives undertaken by different organisations in Kyrgyzstan.
<b>18</b>	Creating an online platform to centralise information, create transparency and present information to all stakeholders e.g. events, exhibitions, seminars.
<b>19</b>	A working group focusing on support for crafts is being set up and led by the Ministry of Culture, government agencies and Heads of Departments, to support the Oimo festival of traditional culture, recommend courses on traditional culture are included in School based education, create a website linked to the official website of the Ministry of Culture.
<b>20</b>	Reaching a level of sustainability is key.
<b>21</b>	Opportunities to develop mentoring and create networks to exchange experience, share information and support collaboration.
<b>22</b>	Creating an online platform providing relevant information about practising craftspeople and crafts products. This could also include professionals in related areas e.g. marketing specialists.



*Images: craft leaders and practitioners discussing and mapping key issues for crafts in Kyrgyzstan.*

During the afternoon part of the workshop, participants again formed small intergenerational groups but this time to create short two-minute films on the theme of a letter to the future craftspeople of Kyrgyzstan, for example in 50 years' time. Key themes developed during the creation of the short films included:

<b>1</b>	Communicating traditional knowledge as a force in itself; everything out of nothing; creating a Tush Kiyiz to share knowledge and practice between family generations.
<b>2</b>	Conveying crafts messages to people all around the world - "know traditions, be sustainable, innovative, give back to community, nature, build cultural legacy, collaborate"; "dear artist, give your art meaning, know your history, be innovative and make it sustainable, and collaborate".
<b>3</b>	"In 50 years, the nation renews, in 100 years, the land renews".
<b>4</b>	Using Instagram to introduce, share and archive individual presentations – lullabies and messages for younger generations; supporting disabled young people's involvement with craft.





*Images: Bishkek, crafts leaders/practitioners creating films about craft on their mobile phones*



*Images: Bishkek, stills from films made by craft practitioners and leaders during the workshop.*

## Workshop 2, Lake Issyk-Kul

The second set of workshops took place over two days in the Aurora resort in Bulan Sogottuu beside Lake Issyk-Kul. 15 crafts practitioners took part, including a combination of men and women, older and younger practitioners, but all deeply connected to craft and crafting families in Kyrgyzstan. Some members of this group were also involved in higher education, tourism, running Yurt camps and developing master classes for international visitors. Shifting emphasis from the mapping approach used in Bishkek, these workshops focused on craft and communication to support the sharing of individual practices and contexts, and the collaborative making of short craft documentaries through intergenerational storytelling and mobile phone-based media production.

During the morning part of the first day participants formed small groups to get to know each other, identify craft communication resources (e.g. narratives, artefacts, materials, places), discuss and present individual craft practices, products, making contexts, business and marketing models. Key themes arising from the discussions included:

<b>1</b>	Environmental and human health benefits of producing yurts from local raw materials, air circulation features aiding sleep, dwellings that can be rapidly assembled, yurts as carriers of traditions and traditional knowledges, popularising yurts using platforms such as Oimo festival (which attracts international visitors), preserving yurt-making through research.
<b>2</b>	Popularising yurt-making through festivals to introduce people to nomadic cultures and lifestyles, establishing special UNESCO status for Kyrgyz yurt-making, establishing a formal/national yurt day, creating a worldwide yurt association to help promote yurt-making on a global level, and raising awareness among government organisations and officials.
<b>3</b>	Communicating, exhibiting and modernising Kyrgyz shyrdak designs, patterns, symbols and meanings, emphasising the use of natural raw materials and associated qualities for human health, relationships with livestock, nomadic history and traditional stories.
<b>4</b>	Felt weaving, shyrdak and felt toy production, emphasising family-based making practices and processes, use of natural raw materials including vegetable dyes and associated durable and health-giving properties, intergenerational learning and the transfer of skills, knowledge and creativity between generations.
<b>5</b>	Developing a symbolic logo for Manjly-Ata sacred site complex, a site of specific interest for tourists and creating craft narratives building on traditional practices to help customers appreciate the value of hand-made craft products.

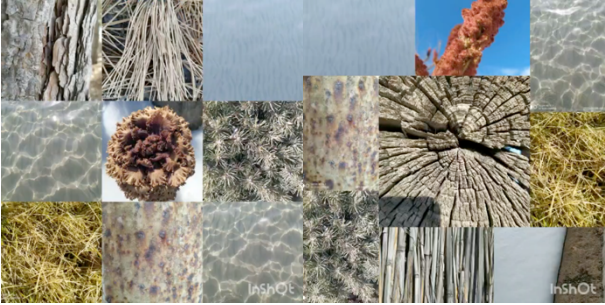


*Images: Lake Issyk-Kul, crafts practitioners discussing and presenting craft practices and products, communication resources and contexts.*

During the afternoon part of the first day, participants continued to work together in small groups using mobile phones to create short audio-visual craft stories. This first set of films focused on telling stories about patterns in the local environment, looking for connections between patterns in the Kyrgyz landscape and Kyrgyz craft narratives, practices and products. Key themes developed during the creation of the short films included:

<b>1</b>	Exploring shapes, patterns and forms in nature, recollecting childhood experience, considering relevance to customers, discussing relationships between formal qualities of films and audiences, unifying visual elements e.g. pattern and colour.
<b>2</b>	Showcasing patterns found in shyrdaks, surprise as an element in filmmaking, texture, using abstract and symbolic images, short films as compressed experiences, sustaining attention/interest and creating impact.
<b>3</b>	Making a film using a patchwork of patterns, creating visual/sonic journeys through formal logic, using close up shots as a formal design quality.
<b>4</b>	Discussing abstraction and sensation in the context of customer interest in concrete stories about craft products (shyrdaks), memory, potential use of animation techniques and diagrammatic representations, shyrdak puzzles.
<b>5</b>	Experimenting with shade and shadows, human and animal drawings in the snow, developing practical skills in photography, repetition of traditional patterns, potential use of animation techniques, patterns and symbols.

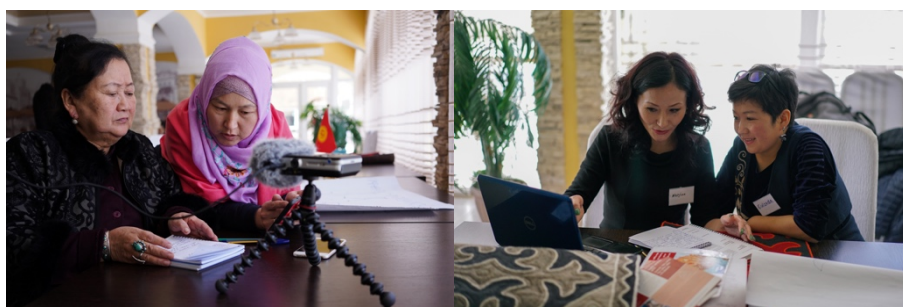




*Images: Lake Issyk-Kul, crafts practitioners and UK researchers creating films about craft and place on mobile phones; stills from craft and place films made by craft practitioners during the workshop.*

The second set of films were developed using images gathered from web archives alongside original material shot on mobile phones and original voice/sound recordings produced during the workshop, with an emphasis on creating intergenerational video messages to the future crafts people of Kyrgyzstan. Key themes developed during the creation of the short films included:

1	Representing traditional skills and knowledge using images, symbols and proverbs to portray the transfer of traditional knowledge from generation to generation “if you want to save your tribe, give education to your son; if you want to preserve your nation, give education to your girls.”
2	Transferring craft peoples’ knowledge into a wooden Kyrgyz chest historically used to hold valuables to transfer to younger generations, continuing traditions.
3	Showing how beautiful the Kyrgyz nature is and the fact that Kyrgyz crafts reflect the beauty of this nature. “Our environment is the main resource that our nation has, so the idea was to make a message of preserving it for future generations”.
4	Eco-friendly techniques and technology used in the production of household items told through the lifespan of a couple, emphasising the value of environmental care for human health to future generations.







*Images: Issyk Kul, crafts practitioners working with UK researchers to create short films based on messages for the future of craft in Kyrgyzstan including stills from films made during the workshop.*

During the final part of the day, workshop participants worked together in small groups to create communication strategies and physical experiences for collective craft futures in and beyond Kyrgyzstan. Key themes explored included:

1	Creating a festival / bazaar using yurts to present nomadic ways of living to public audiences. A 5 to 10 day event starting with the preparation of the event; involving children in traditional games and social activities; providing education of traditional crafts being preserved in districts of Kyrgyzstan e.g. traditional games involving wildlife (Tong district), handicrafts and food products (Jeti Oguz district); children's naming ceremonies, religious ceremonies, traditional house games, masterclasses and a jury awarding prizes.
2	A story of a couple, just married, performing a traditional dance wearing traditional Kyrgyz and Kazakh costume.
3	A second yurt-based festival event taking place over a number of days starting with the preparation and setting up of the yurts; cooking traditional food; practical workshops and traditional ceremonies (including birth, marriage, housewarming) supported by folklore and crafts and involving women and men. Every activity is supported by music, singing, dancing, and evening cultural programmes with traditional games for children and adults.



*Images: craft practitioners developing and sharing ideas for curating craft experiences in Kyrgyzstan.*

## Workshop 3, Osh

The third set of workshops took place at Osh State University, in the city of Osh in the south of Kyrgyzstan, with 29 all female, intergenerational participants working with us over two days. The group included teachers and students of Osh State University and Kyrgyz-Uzbek University alongside crafts practitioners, women's' craft group leaders, and Vice Presidents of the Crafts Council of Kyrgyzstan Batken, Talas, Osh and Jalalabad regions.

As in the previous workshops, the focus was on sharing and communicating information about traditional and evolving Kyrgyz craft practices, contexts and concerns using and developing skills in storytelling, mobile phone-based video creation and sound recording. Following the same approach that was developed for the Issyk Kul workshop, during the morning part of the first day participants formed small groups to get to know each other, identify craft communication resources (e.g. narratives, artefacts, materials, places), discuss and present individual craft practices, products, making contexts, business and marketing models. Key themes arising from the discussions included:

1	Material, spiritual and practical aspects of Ayak-Kap, including the development and symbolism of design elements and embroidery (eagles).
2	Design, development and modernisation of small carpets including their ecological value, material benefits for human health, design, symbolism and meanings, Kurak patchwork (knives, wolf, four quadrants relating to water, air, sun and soil).
3	Historical and contemporary development of Kyrgyz decorative Chyny-Kap (teapot/cup/plate/dish holders) featuring traditional embroidery Terme, traditionally used in Yurts but now also sold as gifts, contemporary appeal to younger generations and potential to be modified for a wider range of purposes e.g. storing books or plants.
4	Origins and historical development of Kiyiz (felt) and relationship with local wool production.
5	Historical development of Kurak (patchwork), including the origins of the name, regional designs, historical and religious values, and use in dowries.

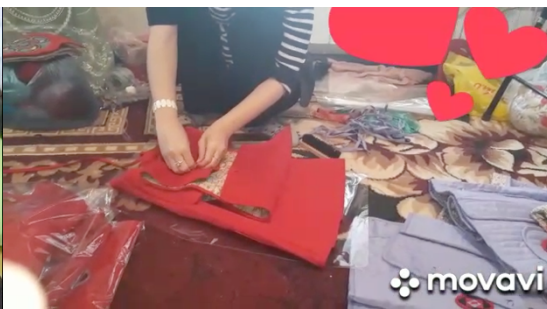


*Image: Osh crafts leaders and crafts practitioners discussing and presenting craft practices and products, communication resources and contexts.*

Continuing the same approach, during the afternoon part of the first workshop participants continued to work together in small groups using mobile phones to create short audio-visual craft stories. As in Issyk Kul, the films that were created focused on telling stories about patterns in the local environment, looking for connections between patterns in the Kyrgyz landscape and Kyrgyz craft narratives, practices and products. During this part of the workshop one of the participants also shared a film she had made with her family as an example of using filmmaking to engage young people in traditional crafts. This focused on the development of traditional long Chapan coats. Key themes developed during the creation of the short films included:

1	Documenting traditional embroidered wedding dress and traditional Kyrgyz marriage rituals.
2	Telling a story about traditional Kyrgyz cradles and their symbolism, use and customs using a traditional cradle song.
3	Developing a meta-narrative about the origins, development and innovation of Kyrgyz embroidery through the idea of a small plant gradually becoming a big tree, a dream connecting design and nature.

4	Representing the recollection of childhood experience of craft teaching through a dream featuring hand weaving, representations of nature and animals, Kyrgyz song and colour.
5	Documenting the use of wool in traditional Kyrgyz crafts, Kiyiz, Shyrdak, Kalpak, Topu, Ormok, their relationship with agricultural wool production, use in everyday life and development in relationship to a contemporary market economy.



*Images: Osh, stills from films about craft and place made on mobile phones by craft practitioners, leaders, teachers and students during the workshop; images of films in production; participants presenting their films to each other.*



The groups continued to work together on the second day of the workshop, this time to prepare scripts and screenplays that were used to create short films using footage shot on mobile phones alongside original voice/sound recordings. As with the workshop in Issyk Kul, the emphasis here was on creating intergenerational video messages to the future craftspeople of Kyrgyzstan. Key themes developed during the creation of the short films included:

1	Call for preservation of handicrafts, traditional knowledge and wisdom that was gathered for generations.
2	Acknowledging the need to safeguard the handicrafts and centuries old traditions as Kyrgyz people's legacy.
3	Call to the younger generation to be aware of their nation's legacy. Importance of transfer of skills from older to younger generations. Main character of national oral epic Manas used as a raw model for youth.
4	History of kilim carpets. Traditional knowledge and centuries old handicraft techniques promote harmonious existence with environment. Waste less production, use of natural raw materials and dyes, recycling are all part of traditional knowledge. Modernity and its adverse effects on traditional crafts. Natural vs synthetic materials.
5	Message to young generations to preserve unique Kyrgyz traditional culture.





*Images: Osh, crafts practitioners working with UK researchers to create short films based on messages for the future of craft in Kyrgyzstan including stills from films made during the workshop.*



As in Issyk Kul, during the final part of the day workshop participants worked together in small groups to create communication strategies and physical experiences for collective craft futures in and beyond Kyrgyzstan. Key themes explored included:

1	Participation in all upcoming regional festivals and tourism related events.
2	Traditional Culture Festival that will showcase preparation and setting up of the nomadic dwelling, traditional cuisine, traditional ceremonies accompanied by practical workshops and various events such as music concerts, cultural programmes with traditional games for children and adults, etc.
3	Need to further develop grassroots programs and projects where local people are given a platform to come together and collectively work out strategies on how to preserve traditional culture and at the same time, how to develop handicrafts that could be competitive in a world market.



*Images: craft practitioners developing and sharing ideas for curating craft experiences in Kyrgyzstan.*

## Insights and Feedback

The generosity, openness, enthusiasm and commitment of the crafts people, leaders, policy makers, teachers, students and business people who were involved in the pilot project were major contributors to its overall success. All of the people who participated in the workshops wanted to share ideas, concerns and experiences to support collective learning and establish shared objectives for craft and communication in Kyrgyzstan. The expert knowledge and extraordinary ability to support engagement and dialogue that were brought to the project by our main partners, Dinara Chochunbaeva, Oksana Konanova and Iskender Osmeov, also played a very significant role in catalysing discussions, bridging gaps, and practically making things happen.

Across all the workshops participants worked hard to complete their short films, engaging deeply with workshop themes and spending a lot of time talking and listening to each other,

exchanging ideas, concerns and contact details. This was, arguably, the greatest value of the project. The sense of excitement about identifying and mapping shared objectives for the future of Kyrgyz craft, and researching, telling and sharing stories about Kyrgyz craft and culture was palpable.

Framing this process as a form of human right has implications for our own elite role as researchers, as Appadurai states:

*The rhetorical reason for viewing research in a rights-based perspective is to force us to take some distance from the normal, professionalised view of research, and derive some benefit from regarding research as a much more universal, elementary and improvable capacity. (Appadurai, 2006)*

Likewise, our own role as outsider researchers in Kyrgyzstan is eminently improvable and always urgently in need of de-parochialisation (across generations), to:

*deparochialise the idea of research and make it more widely available to young people with a wide range of interests and aspirations. Research, in this sense, is not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions). It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one's current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal or aspiration. (Appadurai, 2006)*

At the end of each of the workshops we invited participants to provide feedback on the pilot project and to suggest ideas for future activities on which the Crafting Futures project might focus. Their suggestions included:

<b>1</b>	Undertaking collaborative research to deepen, document and share knowledge of contemporary developments in Kyrgyz crafts and craft techniques.
<b>2</b>	Developing activities, data and statistics to support craft-based policy dialogues in areas including education, preserving and raising awareness of traditional craft practices, establishing quality standards, developing global impact, and protecting intellectual property.
<b>3</b>	Organising more comprehensive training initiatives to support the development of communication, storytelling and practical business skills, raise awareness of/engagement with new technologies and international opportunities, and support participation – particularly for disabled children and their families.
<b>4</b>	Supporting the growth of effective craft networks, intergenerational mentoring and leadership development opportunities.
<b>5</b>	Supporting the creation of physical and digital resources, such as festivals, museums, national collections and online platforms, to increase engagement with craft practices and to raise the visibility of Kyrgyz crafts nationally and internationally.

<b>6</b>	Supporting the development of craft related infrastructure, resource availability and connections between public and private sectors.
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## **Considerations for Future Activities**

Reflecting on the workshops and through ongoing discussions with local partners, we suggest - if agreed with the practitioners and leaders we have collaborated with - that the following areas should be taken into consideration during developing the next phase of our project:

- 1. National, regional and international events, networks and exchanges**
- 2. Crafts business, communication and leadership skills development**

Most, if not all, of the practitioners, teachers and students we met craved contact and exchange with international craftspeople and many told us they would welcome the opportunity to work with others internationally. We also noted, from our own experiences, that younger people might benefit from workshops during which they could investigate and surface thoughts about contemporary technology and craft related innovation. We wondered if it was hard for them to articulate an interest in technology if elders in their groups were less interested in it, or indeed, if they were outwardly wary of more modern manifestations of craft.

Many of the practitioners, leaders and officials we met also voiced needs for craft business, communication and leadership training specific to the development of sustainable livelihoods in modern day Kyrgyzstan. Should training in these areas be agreed as a priority for the next phase of the Crafting Futures project we suggest that it should be developed in collaboration with, and co-led by local practitioners, experts and researchers with insider knowledge about the realities of Kyrgyz markets and selling work online.

In July the Oimo craft festival will take place in Bishkek and Lake Issyk-Kul. Building on ideas discussed during the workshops, the festival and Issyk-Kul area could (subject to the easing of restrictions resulting from covid-19) form a locus for future skills development; national, regional and international networking and exchanges; and exhibitions of Kyrgyz and international crafts. Key figures from crafts, education, business and government in and beyond Central Asia could be invited to the festival to develop networks and share current initiatives and best practices. The event could also be combined with a World Crafts Council Award of Excellence panel (formerly supported by UNESCO) with an array of craft experts judging craft works from throughout Central Asia, to add interest and focus.

### **3. Collaborative research to:**

- a. Deepen knowledge and raise visibility of contemporary Kyrgyz crafts**
- b. Inform policy dialogues oriented towards Kyrgyz crafts**
- c. Support disabled young peoples' and their families' involvement in craft**

Many crafts people, leaders and teachers voiced desires to enhance policy making dialogues to support the development of craft practice, education and enterprise in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz crafts leader and renowned expert Dinara Chochunbaeva identified a specific need to focus on developing a deep audit and gathering of statistics to reveal information that will be beneficial in the long run, and to evidence the economic contribution of craft to the Kyrgyz economy.

Should this be agreed as a priority for the next stage of the Crafting Futures project we will need to establish connections, work with and be guided by Kyrgyz crafts practitioners, experts and scholars in areas including crafts, regional development and economic research. Our own contributions might be to support the creation and exchange of relevant case studies; to co-create platforms, methods and skills development initiatives to support ground-up collaborative mapping; and to co-research the creation and mediation of stories with and about statistics to provide narratives to explain critically and ground statistical evidence and its implications in/for lived experiences and relations. Impacting Kyrgyz policy making dialogues positively towards ethically supporting crafts and crafts people would be a very constructive outcome for the Crafting Futures project.

Several people told us about the longstanding initiatives they had developed to support crafts related education provision in schools for disabled children and their families. Future work could focus on developing international networks and sharing developments in art, design and media education policy, practice and research to support these activities. Developing wider networks and creating opportunities for collaborative research and joint doctorates across Central Asia and Europe would be another desirable, long lasting outcome if funding could be secured, both to support critical intercultural practice and to continue the research into documenting Kyrgyz crafts we were told ceased in the 1990s.

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