Challenge of defining a global concept for handicrafts sector: an economic perspective

Desafio de definir um conceito global para o setor de artesanato: uma perspectiva econômica

El desafío de definir un concepto global para el sector artesanal: una perspectiva económica

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ABSTRACT
Addressing the topic of handicrafts requires defining its concept, as the process of definition helps identify the beneficiaries of this sector, thereby facilitating the preparation of support programs for these beneficiaries. This also allows for understanding one of the lines of development in countries, through which nations can determine the model or form of economic development they will adopt. Based on this premise, this article aims to discuss the most important concepts used to describe handicraft at the international level,along with an attempt to establish a comprehensive definition that outlines the features of the sector.

Keywords: handicraft, craft, small enterprise, micro-enterprise, artisan.JEL Classification: F0, Z31

RESUMO
Abordar o tema do artesanato requer definir seu conceito, pois o processo de definição ajuda a identificar os beneficiários deste setor, facilitando assim a elaboração de programas de apoio a esses beneficiários. Isso também permite entender uma das linhas de desenvolvimento dos países, por meio da qual as nações podem determinar o modelo ou a forma de desenvolvimento econômico que adotarão. Com base nessa premissa, este artigo tem como objetivo discutir os conceitos mais importantes usados para descrever o artesanato em nível internacional, juntamente com uma tentativa de estabelecer uma definição abrangente que delineie as características do setor.

Palavras-chave: artesanato, artesanato, pequena empresa, microempresa, artesão.Classificação JEL: F0, Z31

RESUMEN
Abordar el tema de la artesanía requiere de la definición del concepto, pues el proceso de definición permite identificar a los beneficiarios de este sector, facilitando con ello la elaboración de programas de apoyo a los mismos. Esto permite además entender una de las líneas de desarrollo de los países, a través de la cual las naciones pueden determinar el modelo o forma de desarrollo económico que adoptarán. Partiendo de esta premisa, el presente artículo tiene como objetivo discutir los conceptos más importantes que se utilizan para describir la artesanía a nivel internacional, así como intentar establecer una definición integral que delinee las características del sector.

Palabras clave: artesanía, artesanía, pequeña empresa, microempresa, artesano. Clasificación JEL: F0, Z31

1 INTRODUCTION

The first step toward developing a comprehensive approach to handicraft is to establish a global definition for the sector and to provide it with serious regulations. If we consider its meaning in the British dictionary, the term "CRAFT" refers to the production of something using skill and expertise, (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017) While examining the international economic environment, we find numerous attempts to establish a shared and more realistic vision that defines all points of intersection and convergence between the definitions of handicraft in various countries. This will help formulate an international concept for it. The formulation of a global concept for handicraft will enable the structuring of economic activities as a whole and is considered a priority objective for distinguishing the studied sector from others. This is based on the fact that handicraft is largely an integral part of small enterprises, which represent the most prevalent concept for the sector worldwide. According to statistics, 98% of businesses globally are small enterprises, indicating that handicraft and small enterprises truly represent a widely spread model around the world.

In these circumstances, it is essential to strive for a clearly defined and distinctive global concept for handicraft. This differentiation will help affirm its identity and make it the subject of a genuine policy that grants the sector its rightful place within the framework of various legal, economic, and financial mechanisms that many countries have established to benefit their small and medium enterprises. This will, in turn, help avoid confusion and redundancy while emphasizing integration.

Thus, to enrich this topic, we will present this discussion through the following main question:

Have the global efforts succeeded in formulating a unified concept of Handicrafts across all countries? Our aim is to contribute to the ongoing debate about standardizing the definition of the sector at the global level and to outline a roadmap for it.

The importance of the study lies in its provision of a rich theoretical framework for the concepts of handicrafts in African, Asian, European, and American countries, as well as in international organizations where the sector holds significant importance. This is considered a theoretical contribution that allows for the extraction of key themes that could serve as a foundation for developing a

comprehensive strategy enabling the sector to achieve sustainable development on an international scale. This is accomplished using descriptive and survey methodologies.

To address and analyze this issue, we have divided this article into five main sections, in which we studied the following:

- Definition of Handicrafts in Europe;
- Definition of Handicraftsin Africa;
- Definition of Handicraftsin Asia;
- Definition of Handicraftsin America;
- Definition of Handicraftsin international organizations.

Based on the studies, it has become clear that there is no unified global definition of Handicrafts. This is evident when conducting a comparative analysis based on examples of definitions from various countries and different organizations, as highlighted below.

1. Definition of Handicraftsin European Countries

A. The United Kingdom (UK):

Handicrafts in the United Kingdom are classified as part of the creative and cultural industries. The Ministryof Culture, Media and Sport defined these industries in 1965 as: "industries based on individual creativity, skills, and talents, which have the ability to create wealth and jobs through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property". The United Kingdom is considered the first to introduce the term creative and cultural industries, dividing them into 12 creative sectors, including the handicrafts sector. **(Bokova and Clark, 2013)**

B. Germany:

Handicraft in Germany, known as (Handwerk), is not defined by the size of the enterprise or its turnover, but rather by its legal form. (**Central Association of German Crafts**, **2015)** This sector is classified based on three lists:

- Crafts that require a vocational qualification certificate in handicraft.
- Crafts that can be practiced without certification, with obtaining it being a personal choice.
- Professions related to handicraft that are practiced freely. (European Bureau of Crafts, 2015)

The list of handicraft activities in Germany includes 151 crafts distributed among the aforementioned categories. Currently, the first list contains 41 crafts, the second list has 53 crafts, and the third list includes 57 crafts.(**Central Association of GermanCrafts, 2015)**

C. Poland:

Handicraftin Poland represents an important part of the structure of its small and medium-sized enterprises sector and is considered a crucial pillar of the country's economy, history, and culture. The law issued on September 6, 2001, defines handicraft as: "the professional management of an economic activity by a natural person, who is qualified and works independently, employing up to fifty workers." According to this law, commercial activities, transportation, hospitality, restaurants, and health services are excluded from this sector. **(KARI, 2013)**

D. Italy:

In Italy, a handicraft enterprise is defined by the law dated August 8, 1985, as: "an enterprise promoted and managed by a person who possesses the qualifications and skills of anartisan entrepreneur, The latter hasa specific dimension as defined by law; the enterprise aims to manufacture final goods and semi-finished products, as well as to provide services, and has a defined legal form."

Professional competence is considered a fundamental factor for practicing any handicraft activity across more than 300 crafts in the production and service sectors mentioned in the aforementioned law, which are further divided into 13 craft fields. **(KARI, 2013)**

2. Definition of Handicraft in Africa: We will present the concepts of handicraft in Niger, Senegal, and Guinea.

A. Niger:

The handicraft enterprise in Niger is defined by the decree issued on July 7, 1992, as: "a small or micro enterprise (SMEs) that produces goods or provides services in one of the fields of handicrafts, whether in production or services, characterized by a predominance of manual labor." This enterprise consists of one or several individuals coming together for the production process and/or a cooperative, all of whom hold the status of artisan and are registered in the register of handicrafts across seven specific craft sectors outlined in this decree.

Foundedon studies, handicraft enterprises in Niger can be categorized into three main groups based on their presence in rural or urban areas, namely:

- Small or micro enterprises of artisans who own shops with street fronts.
- Small or micro enterprises of artisans who operate in markets with non-permanent shops.
- Small or micro enterprises of artisans who do not own any of the above, making it difficult to determine their number. (Maldonado, Badiane and Miélot, 2014)

B. Senegal:

The decree dated October 10, 1987, defines a handicraft enterprise based on its active practices and the number of its employees. An enterprise is considered a handicraft enterprise if it engages in activities in the fields of production, transformation, repair, or services, employing no more than five workers. Family members of the owner (spouse, ancestors, descendants) and trainees are not counted among these employees. Thus, artisans are distributed across three main fields: handicraft for production, handicraftfor services, and traditional artistic handicrafts. (Gersdorff, 2005)

C. Guinea:

According to the handicraftlaw issued on June 17, 1998, in Guinea, handicraftrepresents: "any activity of extraction, production, maintenance, transformation, repair, or service provision, primarily practiced manually and fundamentally within one of the sectors included in the annex of this law." Thus, a artisan is defined as: "any worker who operates independently and possesses the required professional qualifications, engaging in activities for their own benefit, primarily alone or with the assistance of family members, trainees, or assistants; conducting manual activities in extraction, production, transformation, maintenance, repair, or service provision that generates a profitable return." (Kourouma, 2013)

3. Definition of Handicraftin Asia: Here we will explore the definition of the sector in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Japan.

A. Saudi Arabia:

Handicraftin the Kingdom lack a specific system that regulates their activities as a promising economic, social, and cultural sector. Existing regulations do not define a specific concept or framework for crafts, but rather place them within the general economic activity, negatively affecting their survival—regardless of their size—among other commercial and industrial sectors. Aware of the importance of this sector, the responsible authorities have prepared a draft proposal for a regulation governing handicrafts in the Kingdom, which will be submitted for approval. Some key features of this regulation include definitions for:

- **crafts and Handmade Industries:** These are defined as artistic or heritage production activities that:
    - Primarily rely on manual labor;
    - Are practiced as a main and continuous profession;
    - Aim to transform raw materials into manufactured or semi-manufactured products using tools or without;
    - Utilize local environmental resources primarily based on availability.

- **craft Artisan:** This refers to someone who personally practices a craft from the approved lists, whether continuously or seasonally, and is registered in the artisans register. They produce handicraft products manually, using local natural materials primarily based on availability, and their qualifications are based on previous learning or sufficient practice of the craft. They operate independently or with assistance from family members, partners, or trainees and contribute personally to managing their work and producing the products they market.
- **Craft Enterprise:** This is an enterprise that produces handicraft products primarily through manual labor, where the manager or operator participates in administration and production as artisans. This enterprise is registered in the handicraft enterprises register.
- **Craft Product:** This is a product primarily manufactured manually using local natural materials based on availability.
- The definitions of crafts and handmade industries,artisans, craft enterprises, and craft products are officially registered by the responsible authority in a register that is reviewed periodically.
- The list of craft activities includes two main fields: the field of heritage crafts and the field of artistic production crafts, which encompass 41 craft activities that a Saudi individual can practice. (Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2017)

B. Jordan:

The definition of handicraft in Jordan is included in Regulation No. 32 regarding **(crafts,handicraft, folk industries and their trade)**, issued in 2002. Within this framework, handicrafts are defined as: "any profession that meets the following conditions: practiced as a main profession, primarily relying on manual labor, aiming to transform a raw material into a finished product or a semi-finished product."

A handicraftenterprise is defined as: "any Organicperson, cooperative society, company, or institution engaged in an activity related to the profession." It is important to clarify that the term "profession" in this regulation refers to "the profession of handicraft, folk crafts, the production and trade of artifacts." **(Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan, 2009)**

C. Japan:

According to available studies, Japan is considered a nation of handicrafts, characterized by a diverse array of handicraft activities. The term "TE KOGEI-HIN" in Japanese refers to a mode of work in which goods with functional and/or artistic characteristics are primarily manufactured by hand or using simple tools. Thus, handicraft products are generally regarded as traditional works made as an essential part of daily life, utilizing locally available raw materials, featuring simple decorations that reflect the country's identity. These products can be functional, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally expressive,

decorative, practical, traditional, social, and symbolically significant. (Sanaka, 2008)

4. Definition of Handicraft in America

A. Brazil:

The definition of handicraft, or (O Artesanato in Brazilian Portuguese), does not specify the activity practiced but rather defines the final product obtained. According to the Brazilian Handicrafts Program [PAB - Programa de Artesanato Brasileiro] introduced in 2000, handicraft is defined as: "the product resulting from the transformation of raw materials, often by hand or with limited use of simple equipment and tools, by a person who possesses artistic skills passed down from ancestors. This product combines creativity, skill, and cultural value." (Edny and Lemos, 2011)

B. Canada:

The Canadian CraftsFederation provided a definition of handicraft by establishing a standard occupations classification (SOC) in 1991. According to this classification, artisans and crafts are categorized under group (SOC F144) as "those practicing occupations characterized by the use of manual and artistic skills in the design and production of various craft products, this includes crafts such as glass engraving, arts and crafts teaching, pottery, metalworking, textiles, sewing, musical instrument making, leatherworking, metal engraving, as well as painters, artists, and engravers.

Additionally, there are other groups likely to include traditional crafts according to the Canadian concept of the studied sector, specifically group (SOC F143), which pertains to theater, fashion, exhibitions, and other creative designers, as well as group (SOC F141), which includes interior designers, and group (SOC F142), which encompasses graphic designers and decorative artists. (The Canadian Craft Federation, 2011)

C. Mexico:

The concept of handicraft in Mexico, or (artesanía in Mexican Spanish), It is not much different from the definitions we mentioned above. It represents a local aspect of social construction, identity, and traditions, influenced by the culture and customs of the country. It encompasses a variety of occupations practiced by hand, whose outputs combine natural materials, authenticity, skill, and creativity of artisans. The products are designed for utilitarian, decorative, or other purposes. (Domínguez, 2007)

5. Definition of Handicraft by International Organizations

A. Definition by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):

In 1969, UNCTAD provided a definition that distinguished handicrafts from handmade as follows: "The term 'handmade products' applies to all units produced with the aid of simple tools or means, and all equipment used by artisans, which mainly involves manual labor or assistance from a person. In contrast, the handicraft products differ from their handmade counterparts in the following ways:

- The traditional or artistic character that reflects the characteristics and traditions of the producing country;
- Products crafted by artisans who often work from home." (chafika, 2002)

B. Definition of the World Council for Handicrafts:

In 1984, the World Council for Handicrafts categorized crafts into four groups:

- **Artistic Creations :** This category includes activities where the products have a creative content and require high skills and techniques for their production.
- **Folk and Traditional Arts:** The products in this category reflect expressions inspired by local and national traditions and cultures, requiring a high degree of proficiency and craftsmanship.
- **Crafts:** This includes workshops that produce traditional, authentic products made by hand but in large quantities. If these workshops expand to the point of division of labor, their products will no longer be considered traditional crafts; rather, they will be mass-produced items that carry local flavor and are aimed at the broader market.
- **Industrial Production:** This relates to all models of traditional crafts or materials that are re-produced using automated machines and in large quantities. (ANQUETIL, 1984)

C. Definition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC):

In a seminar titled "**Crafts and Global Market**" held on October 8, 1997, in Manila, Philippines, UNESCO and the International Trade Center defined handicrafts as follows: "Craft products are those made by artisans either exclusively by hand or with the assistance of hand tools or mechanical aids, provided that the artisan's hand contribution constitutes the majority of the final product. These products are produced without a specified quantity and use raw materials derived from sustainable natural resources. They derive their unique characteristics from distinctive features that may be functional, aesthetic, artistic, creative, cultural, decorative, symbolic, or significant, reflecting ideological or social aspects. This is what gives them a social, cultural, and economic role." **(UNESCO)**

D. Definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO):

According to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO_88) issued in 1988 and published in 1991, artisans are classified in group seven of occupations and are defined as follows: "The term **Artisan** and workers in craft-related professions refers to individuals who perform their work manually or with the aid of hand tools, mechanical tools, or other equipment that helps reduce physical effort or the time required to carry out specific tasks or to achieve quality products." They are classified into:

- **Artisans and Workers in Extraction and Construction Professions:** This includes those who prepare and extract solid minerals from mines, as well as those involved in building, maintaining, and repairing structures….
- **Artisans and Workers in Mining and Construction Machinery Professions:** This group consists of individuals working in welding and reassembling metals, constructing, maintaining, and repairing heavy steel structures, and installing, maintaining, and repairing machinery, among others.
- **Artisans and Workers in Precision Engineering, Arts, Painting, and Similar Professions:** This includes repairers of precision instruments and musical instruments, as well as jewelers and those working with precious metals.
- **Artisans and Workers in Other Craft-related Professions:** This group encompasses professions involved in processing and preparing raw materials for agriculture and fishing, transforming them into food and other products, as well as carpentry, textiles, fur and leather work, and other materials.**(International Labour Organization)**

E. Definition of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO):

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has divided handicrafts into four categories based on the target market as follows:

- **Fine Traditional Crafts**: These crafts express ethnic characteristics and traditional heritage, featuring a unique character. They are produced as individual pieces and classified as artistic works, often displayed in museums and art exhibitions, and purchased by collectors of artifacts.
- **Traditional Crafts:** These crafts utilize traditional methods, with products handmade using conventional raw materials and technologies. The difference between these and fine traditional crafts is that artisans often seek assistance from designers to adapt products to market demands while ensuring the preservation of ethnic characteristics and historical backgrounds. They can be produced in larger quantities.
- **Commercial Crafts:** These products are traditionally made and adapted to meet market needs and tastes, often in a highly fashionable manner, targeting foreign buyers. They are produced in large

quantities using a greater variety and number of production methods and are displayed in specialty stores and retail shops.

- **Manufactured Crafts:** This category includes all forms of traditional crafts that are reproduced using automated machines. They are produced in larger volumes and may not adhere to the traditional characteristics of the original product. (Unido)

F. Definition of the European Union (EU):

In November 2001, the European Commission proposed an economic and statistical methodology specifically designed for small and artisanal enterprises within the European Union. This methodology was developed following a survey of the common elements used by each member country to define this type of enterprise. The result was the identification of four key common factors used to formulate a statistical definition of artisanal enterprises, allowing for a consistent determination of their number and the collection of comparable data across all relevant countries. Thesefactors are:

- **Legal Status of the Enterprise**: According to this criterion, an artisanal enterprise is defined as an individual enterprise, a partnership, or a cooperative. This study found that 8 out of the 15 member countries of the European Union rely on this criterion for definition.
- **Occupation Practiced within the Enterprise**: The International Classification of Occupations is referenced to identify occupations with artisanal characteristics, classified in its seventh group. This criterion has been used for the definition in 12 of the relevant countries.
- **Economic Activities of the Enterprises**: An artisanal enterprise is defined as one whose economic activity falls within a specific sector identified as a craft. This criterion has been adopted in 7 countries, where artisanal activities are specified as those in manufacturing, construction, repair, transportation, and other services. In Spain and England, however, artisanal activities are considered to be those requiring very specialized skills, particularly in manufacturing activities such as food production, woodworking, metalworking, ceramics, and certain services.
- **Number of Employees**: This criterion has been applied in seven member countries, where an artisanal enterprise is defined as one employing fewer than 50 workers.

Ultimately, the following definition was adopted:

"Artisanal enterprises are defined as enterprises run by self-employed individuals or freelance workers engaged in activities classified under Group 7 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) or activities identified as crafts, and employing fewer than 50 workers." (Benlamoudi, 2018)

At the end of this extensive international journey, we find that although the term 'handicraft' exists in all languages and in all countries, it does not cover the same realities from one country to another. Founded on what has been previously presented, there are four main approaches used by countries to define their handicrafts, which are:

- **Professional Approach**: Based on the activity practiced without specifying the size of the enterprise, as seen in Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Colombia, Mexico, and Vietnam
- **Sectoral/Dimensional Approach**: This approach uses the size of the enterprise alongside the nature of the activity practiced to define the sector, as in France, Italy, Senegal, Niger, Guinea, Algeria, Poland, and Hungary.
- **Artistic Approach**: This approach is limited to artistic crafts in its definition of the sector, as seen in Spain, Mexico, and Colombia
- **Other Approaches**: These pertain to countries that do not have an official definition of the sector and instead relate it to the share of small and medium-sized enterprises within their economy. (Benlamoudi, 2018)

This difference in the definition of the term 'handicraft' has so far prevented the establishment of a unified definition for the sector, and it serves as a factor that weakens the Handicraft sector on an international level. Therefore, for the benefit of the global economy, establishing a universal concept of handicrafts appears to be a necessary and priority action that would define current stakes and future challenges. It also represents a unique opportunity to enhance the economic influence of handicrafts and increase their impact on certain decisions that affect their future.

On the other hand, by analyzing the points of convergence between the aforementioned concepts, we find that they share the following characteristics:

- **Connection to the Hand work**: They are linked to manual work that relies on craftsmanship, even if this skill results from the precision of mechanization.
- **Aesthetic and/or Utility Value**: The products possess aesthetic and/or functional value that reflects the cultural and traditional heritage of the country.

Thus, we can say that handicrafts constitute a sector made up of a large and complex body of various families of predominantly manual trades. This sector combines cultural heritage with economic efficiency. In addition to its products reflecting identity, traditions, and heritage, and contributing to the preservation of societal values, it also serves as a significant employer of labor, meets the daily needs of the community, and acts as a source for wealth creation.

2 CONCLUSION

Handicrafts have gradually taken their place in the global economic system, prompting researchers to attempt to establish a universal concept for them. It is clear that creating an international concept of handicraft is not an easy task, as it highlights numerous issues related to defining handicrafts in many countries on one hand, and distinguishing them from other sectors while enhancing their role as an economic, social, and cultural stake on the other hand. Nevertheless, despite the varying concepts of the sector resulting from the economic, social, and cultural differences among countries and their development priorities, this does not negate the existence of connections and synergies that transcend these national divisions.

Certainly, the increasing interest in handicrafts at the global level, as outlined above, is a result of other practical changes brought about by comprehensive development policies implemented by some governments. These governments have realized that the concept of handicrafts transcends the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the sector and its cultural and heritage value in all its material and spiritual dimensions. It also encompasses its economic and social roles, stemming from its significant ability to absorb unemployment and create job opportunities with limited resources. Additionally, it can contribute to local production and public income while meeting the basic needs of citizens. Furthermore, its activities are essential for a wide range of individuals and enhance the role of women, particularly in rural areas, which contributes to population stability. This, along with being a key contributor to tourism growth and foreign currency generation, supports overall development.

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