

Thematic Workshop “Apprenticeship”

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Background Paper

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Skills and know-hows for traditional crafts are part of communities' heritage and identity, and contribute to social and economic development. Apprenticeship has long been the system ensuring the transmission of these skills. Today apprenticeship is threatened by changing circumstances affecting the social, economic and learning environment within which it used to be embedded.

Whereas it is regulated in many European countries, apprenticeship is greatly devalued in Mediterranean partner countries: there are hardly any structures, institutions, or laws, addressing this form of education/production, with the result that many skills and masters, still thriving some thirty years ago, have disappeared or are fast disappearing.

In this context, this paper provides a background for discussing the following issues:

- 1. The definition of apprenticeship and traditional system;*
- 2. The socioeconomic role of apprenticeship in traditional crafts;*
- 3. New approaches to apprenticeship in Europe and Mediterranean partner countries;*
- 4. And the role of the state and institutional partners in supporting a shift from traditional to renovated apprenticeship systems.*

1. DEFINITION OF APPRENTICESHIP AND TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

Apprenticeship is a particular system of learning based on the relation between a master artisan and an apprentice during long-term on-the-job training. It entails a hierarchy and a step-by-step process of learning and skills acquisition. Apprentices would often start their training at a very young age and live with the master, developing a father-to-son relation. In fact, in many trades, skills were transmitted exclusively within the family as a way of maintaining the secrets of the trade and often, masters would only take a limited number of apprentices with a view to handing their business over to them.

Apprenticeship was embedded in a structured system of trade corporations or guilds, itself hierarchical. Access to the guild was usually restricted to members having completed the full cycle

of apprenticeship. Apprenticeship entailed more than just technical skills, but also commercial and managerial ones. An apprentice was ready to take over from the master when he was not only a skilled artisan, but also one able to control the production process and to transmit his skills. This is why apprenticeship is also a form of continuity in the life of a community, and a personal and cultural experience.

Within the community, apprenticeship was a recognized system of knowledge and know-how transmission and safeguarding, of identity maintenance, and contributed to social and economic development. It was economically viable because of the low costs of the apprentices.

In the learning process, no formal pedagogical or theoretical programme was involved. Progress from one phase to the next was left to the discretion of the master craftsman, which could lead to periods of training extending over several years.

Three main phases of traditional apprenticeship can be identified:

- An introductory (or observation) phase, during which the apprentice watches the actions and conduct of the master craftsman and assimilates them into his (more rarely her) behaviour;
- A phase devoted to instruction in the media, instruments and their use, with an opportunity to undertake simple and repetitive technical tasks, to learn through trial and error;
- A phase entailing participation in more complex tasks and the production of finished objects. The apprentice also starts to supervise new arrivals and learns to negotiate with customers during this phase.

2. CHALLENGES TO TRADITIONAL APPRENTICESHIP

Several factors have affected traditional apprenticeship systems.

- The structure of guilds and their system of skill transmission and validation have long declined in the Middle East and North Africa with the influx of manufactured goods from Europe and more recently South-East Asia.
- Public administrations have been modernised and centralised and have taken upon themselves to reorganise trade sectors. Guilds have been replaced by cooperatives or professional associations (trade unions) supposed to represent members' interests towards the authorities. But membership is not always compulsory, and these bodies do not always sanction skills and qualifications.
- Tastes have changed too with rapid urbanisation and modernisation, making traditional products or building styles less attractive. Everywhere, the economic value of crafts has declined drastically.

- National laws now ban child labour, and the learning process has changed considerably with the introduction of formal schooling. Young people in communities may find the sometimes lengthy apprenticeship necessary to learn many traditional forms of craft too demanding and instead seek work in factories or service industry where the work is less exacting and the pay often better.
- Parents often want their children to acquire formal education and degrees as forms of social promotion. There is a widespread perception that traditional crafts and skills are low status jobs, with vocation training or apprenticeship perceived as being only for those who fail school.
- In many countries, the liberalisation of economies in the last decades has created more competition in the crafts and trade sector. Owners of small and medium enterprises have used a growing number of apprentices to reduce labour costs and increase returns.
- In many cases, such as in traditional city-centres with a high concentration of crafts workshops, goals of profitability have been superimposed on the traditional paternalistic relation, resulting in a highly exploitative apprenticeship system: apprentices are poorly paid, poorly trained, unprotected by labour laws, work in poor safety conditions, etc.
- The content and goals of apprenticeship have been considerably transformed in the process. There is a high turn-over of apprentices, who are quickly taught specialized skills and are hardly given the time to master them. Also, the system does not allow for the development of a relation of trust between the pupil and the master, which is necessary for the latter to transmit his trade secrets to the former, contributing to or resulting in the disappearance of the knowledge.

3. APPRENTICESHIP AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Yet apprenticeship has several benefits: it develops the sensitivity of the apprentice to the intangible qualities and dimension of crafts; it helps maintain the traditional relationship between master/mentor and a pupil characteristic of the learning process; and it ensures continuity between training and work. Importantly for developing countries, apprenticeship systems can play a role in poverty-reduction, the maintenance of group cohesion, and the empowerment of marginalised groups.

The decisive role played by professional training in the socio-economic development of countries is widely acknowledged, and apprenticeship must be reconsidered as one valid method of professional training. Several European experiences in both the industrial and traditional crafts sectors testify that renovating apprenticeship systems contributes to the development of human resources at the national level. In many European countries where a standardized, accredited, workplace-based training system is in place, apprenticeship is the model of an integrated human resource development strategy.



In developing countries worldwide, several projects and programmes supported by national authorities and international organizations deal with skill transmission and acquisition with a view to preserving traditional crafts and know-how but also to addressing unemployment. Many of these programs focus on women in rural or poor areas, with the aim of reviving traditional crafts and open markets locally or internationally. However, there is a difference of nature between skill transmission, even within a formalised project, and structured systems of apprenticeship, be they traditional or renovated. To be considered apprenticeship, skill transmission should be complemented with the acquisition of commercial and managerial skills, the development of creative capacities, an a formal system of recognition by peers and/or the authorities.

Others initiatives focus on youth, at times including non-formal education (literacy, numeracy, basic accounting). Key issues to attract young people into apprenticeship schemes and improve the general perception of this form of education are awareness-raising and the economic viability of the system. Apprenticeship should lead to sustainable employment by meeting labour market needs.

One proven way of reinforcing and strengthening these systems is to offer financial incentives to students and teachers to make knowledge transfer more attractive to both. This is why renovated apprenticeship schemes for traditional crafts cannot be conceived without an investment from the part of the state and the industry in the protection and marketing of traditional crafts. This can be done by developing the marketing value of crafts, for the niche luxury market, global marketing (through internet), and for the tourism market, keeping in mind that not all types of tourism markets are beneficial to quality and skill maintenance. Mass tourism, in particular, results in standardization of crafts production.

However, there is also another tendency that is worth exploiting. In response to urbanization and industrialization, many people around the world enjoy handmade objects that are imbued with the accumulated knowledge and cultural values of the craftspeople and which offer a softer alternative to the numerous “high-tech” items that dominate global consumer culture. Besides creating new objects or buildings, skills and know-how are essential for conservation of existing artefacts and buildings.

But economic performance might not be the only way to measure the benefits of apprenticeship. When the aim of these projects is economic and social development rather than conservation of heritage or traditional skills, the authenticity of the crafts taught might not be considered as a priority. This is why there should be a balance to satisfy both sides.

4. ADAPTATION AND INNOVATIONS IN APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEMS

In Europe, a number of training centres have been set up since the 1960s offering courses of varying length in craft processes. Originally, the emphasis was on the built heritage, responding to the needs in the fields of restoration and conservation where craftsmen capable of restoring and maintaining historical buildings were scarce. Subsequently, a number of other initiatives have taken a broader look at skill transmission to include a variety of media (wood, metal, textile,



ceramics, etc.). These centres associate practical training with theoretical content, and often offer a system of apprenticeship. This workshop will introduce two European examples: the Escuela Taler and l'Ecole d'Avignon. In Mediterranean partner countries, one example of this type of institutions is the College of Traditional Islamic Art and Architecture created in the late 1990s in Amman along the principle that “there is no cession between knowledge, crafts and education”. The College offers two educational pathways: a system of apprenticeship for trainees who have not completed secondary school, and a system of graduate studies combining theoretical and practical teachings in a verity of crafts. The College's most outstanding achievement has been the reconstruction of Salah Ed-Din minbar (an intricately designed and carved medieval wooden pulpit) at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Today in Europe, numerous networks, associations and guilds deal with training in crafts. Some organise training workshops/sessions, others run an apprenticeship system with certification schemes. Maybe the most remarkable guild-based system is that of the French “compagnonnage” inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as “a unique way of conveying knowledge and know-how linked to the trades that work with stone, wood, metal, leather, textiles and food.” Training lasts on average five years, during which apprentices regularly move from town to town, both in France and abroad, to discover types of knowledge and ways of passing them on. To be eligible to transmit this knowledge the apprentice must produce a “masterwork”, examined and assessed by the compagnons.

Historic buildings and complexes where continuous maintenance is needed also provide site-based training in architectural crafts. A number of Mediterranean partner countries have adopted this approach for specific buildings, or entire city-centres, or traditional villages. These initiatives are usually meet several goals: they document traditional architecture, support restoration and conservation projects, and ensure skills maintenance.

Other existing initiatives include houses of heritage encouraging local or national communities to develop their crafts and trades. These state-sponsored houses can include workshops and/or crafts projects in artisans’ homes. In some cases, they are only outlets for traditional crafts production which is certified, exhibited, and offered for sale.

Still other formalised systems of apprenticeship include those run by firms specialising in conservation architecture who learn their trade with master craftspeople in the firm together with following theoretical courses within specialised education institutions that deliver them a degree. Such private sector initiatives also exist in Mediterranean partner countries. Some have grown big and may employ as many as several hundred master artisans, artisans, workers and apprentices. Their successes are based on a combination of excellence in production, traditional methods of production integrating original and innovative designs, and marketing techniques often targeting high-end niche and export markets. They also follow the traditional system of knowledge transmission by organizing workshop along the customary apprenticeship system.

In Mediterranean partner countries, initiatives to structure existing traditional apprenticeship systems are still in their infancy. They are starting to pick up with a view to equip professionals in

the industry to meet the demands of the international market by improving the production process, particularly in the health and safety field, respecting the environment, modernising equipment, and introducing innovation in the sector.

Some countries are developing specific schemes tailored to the needs of their various priority target groups: young uneducated people, women, the poor, crafts workers struggling to access markets that have ever-increasing standards, and micro-entrepreneurs facing the constraints of regional and international competition. Some of these initiatives are led by proponents of traditional apprenticeship. Others are the outcome of a partnership between these proponents, national authorities, and international donors.

These initiatives converge towards the restructuring of traditional apprenticeship into dual work/theory training schemes. A growing trend is that of partnerships between educational institutions that offer theoretical training and degrees, and private sector firms or individual artisans accredited by the school and who receive apprentices in a formalised way. Time spent in apprenticeship is fully integrated in the school curriculum and considered for the delivery of the degree. This type of skill development consists of acquiring not just technical competencies (knowing how to reproduce, copy and also improve an object), but also social competencies (alignment with a given occupational tradition, negotiating with clients) and general competencies (managing business profitably, adapting in order to access markets).

For these initiatives to be successful, a number of conditions have to be met:

- Cooperation between public institutions and the sector concerned in designing and running the scheme;
- Proper wages and social security coverage for the apprentices;
- Incentives for master craftspeople to take an apprentice;
- Compatibility between the needs of the industry and the type of training delivered in vocational or training centres;
- A permanent and highly qualified teaching staff;
- Several types of educational pathways suited to the profile of the apprentices: young school drop-outs who need remedial education; but also apprentices graduated from the secondary school system, or even from university;
- Certification at the end of the apprenticeship period.

Financial subsidies for apprenticeship can help skilled craftsmen take on apprentices over several years, helping with the wages and other costs. Depending on where the initiative stems from, the costs of training the apprentices is covered either from members of the trade through cooperatives or professional associations, or by the state. In both cases, these efforts can be subsidised by international donors.

5. POLICIES

Policies are the key to institutionalise and regulate both the crafts sector and apprenticeship.



Existing cultural heritage legislations generally focus on the tangible dimensions of heritage. Not all Mediterranean partner countries have adequate legal definition of the traditional craft sector, and even fewer integrate apprenticeship as a key element of the sector. The status of apprenticeship might also be inadequately defined in labour laws. There is also the issue of accreditation and quality control of apprenticeship schemes.

Governments have a role to play in introducing measures and legislations that support the continuous viability of crafts, in particular by protecting the intellectual property of traditional producers, and requiring the use of traditional building material or techniques. Authenticity, quality, fair-trade and other labels (such as Cultural Development Products supported by UNESCO) are all marketing tools that can be granted by public or sectoral bodies.

Intellectual property for traditional knowledge is underdeveloped in Arab countries. Many traditional production techniques are trade secrets that need to be protected nationally but also internationally to prevent unlawful competition. Patent or copyright registrations can help a community (a guild, a professional association), rather than individuals, to benefit of protection from its traditional techniques, motifs and crafts. Certain elements under traditional apprenticeship system may qualify for such protection.

States and concerned sectoral institutions need to improve their knowledge of apprenticeship practises, and better study the socio-economic benefits of skill maintenance and know how transmission through apprenticeship. There is at present a lack of documentation on the issue to form the basis for policy and planning decisions.

Regional cooperation and exchange of best practises should be encouraged, especially since some Mediterranean partner countries are more advanced than other in the field of crafts development, institutionalisation, and protection, and in renovating apprenticeship systems.

Finally, a possible strategic option to gain access to international support for the renovation and development of apprenticeship systems for traditional crafts is to reposition craftsmanship as a domain of intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage considers, among others, the maintenance of skills and know-how associated with craftsmanship, while leaving ample space for creativity. Furthermore the definition of safeguarding measures under the Convention includes formal and non formal transmission of intangible heritage, of which apprenticeship is a foremost example.