

International Symposium

HANDS-ON ETHNOGRAPHIES: Production and Meaning of (Contemporary) Handicrafts

Ljubljana, 23 May 2025

Book of Abstracts



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Hands-on Ethnographies: Production and Meaning of (Contemporary) Handicrafts
International symposium
Ljubljana, 23 May 2025
Book of abstracts

Edited by: Veronika Zavratnik, Tajda Jerkič, Mateja Habinc, Jana Rajh Plohl

Ljubljana 2025: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts,
University of Ljubljana

Venue:

Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

The event is part of the programme Faculty of Arts' Year of Heritage.

Programme committee:

Assist. Prof. Veronika Zavratnik, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts,
Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

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1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia (Blue Room, 5th floor)

MAKE, REPAIR, RECYCLE!

8.30–13.00	Handicraft fair (Main Hall, ground floor) Craftspeople and Institutions: Anselma, Jana Koteska, Knjižnica reči, Smetumet
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PROGRAMME OF THE SYMPOSIUM

8.30–9.00	Registration and morning coffee (Blue Room, 5th floor)
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9.00–9.15	Opening remarks (Mojca Schlamberger Brezar, Dean of the Faculty of Arts; Boštjan Kravanja, Head of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology)
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	Session 1: Representations (Moderator: Saša Poljak Istenič, Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology)
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9.15–9.45	<i>Ethnography on Hand(s): Production as/of Meaning in (Contemporary) Handicraft</i> , Blaž Bajič
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9.45–10.15	<i>Creativity, Gender, and the Politics of the Commons: Old and New Feminist Approaches to Craft</i> , Nicolette Makovicky (Zoom)
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10.15–10.45	<i>The Agency of a Working Hand: New Craft Movement in Contemporary Poland</i> , Ewa Klekot
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10.45–11.15	<i>Intellectual Property Rights, Constructions of Authorship and the Protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions</i> , Martin Fredriksson
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11.15–11.45	Coffee break
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	Session 2: Practices (Moderator: Špela Ledinek Lozej, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology)
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11.45–12.15	<i>Hare's Paw and Micro Weld – Exploring the Driving Forces Behind Technological Implementation in Silversmithing Practices</i> , Linn Sigrid Bratland
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12.15–12.45	<i>"I Just Love Doing This!": Crafting Beyond Heritage</i> , Tajda Jerkič and Veronika Zavratnik
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12.45–13.15	<i>Handicraft Heritage as a Tool for Addressing the Challenges of Adolescence and Aging</i> , Jasna Fakin Bajec
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14.00	Lunch
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16.30	Visit to Center Rog (Trubarjeva cesta 72, 1000 Ljubljana (riverside))
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Ethnography on Hand(s): Production as/of Meaning in (Contemporary) Handicraft

This lecture interrogates contemporary handicraft as a site and instance of cultural production in late capitalist production. Often celebrated as traditional, authentic, or timeless, handicraft is valorized in public and – all too often – professional and even academic discourses as a way to preserve cultural heritage, strengthen local identity, resist homogenizing globalization, reintroduce aesthetic value, etc. However, this ostensibly oppositional stance belies its profound integration into the very structures it purports to counter. This lecture explores how contemporary handicraft serves as an ideological suture, smoothing over the fractures of late capitalism by providing a comforting narrative of rootedness, human creativity, and individual genuineness in a system that thrives on alienation and commodification, thus effectively deepening precisely these tendencies. At the same time, handicraft is increasingly valued not for its cultural or aesthetic significance alone but for its ability to generate surplus value within capitalist economies. Whether commodified as high-end artisanal goods, “ethnic” (and “ethic”) decor, or sustainable items, beyond its usefulness in social distinction, handicraft’s worth is “objectively” measured by its profitability. This dual character of handicraft—as ideologically meaningful and as economically valuable—exposes not the tensions between cultural preservation and market standardization, but paradoxes inherent in production as/of meaning in (contemporary) handicraft itself.

Keywords: cultural production, late capitalism, ideology, commodification, authenticity

Blaž Bajič is an assistant professor of cultural anthropology and a researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. He conducts research in the fields of urban anthropology, anthropology of art, aestheticization of the environment, popular culture and anthropology of the senses. He publishes in domestic and foreign scientific periodicals. Lately, he coedited a number of volumes, including *Sensory Environmental Relationships: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of the Future* (Vernon, 2023).

Nicolette Makovicky

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Creativity, Gender, and the Politics of the Commons: Old and New Feminist Approaches to Craft

In this paper, I put classic feminist work on textile craft industries into a critical dialogue with newer feminist theorizations of economics, institutions, state, market, and home. Highlighting the ways in which capitalist market practices interplay with patriarchal norms, the classical literature on craft and craft production presents craft as inherently bound to conception of femininity, and conditions of labour as almost universally exploitative to craftswomen - especially those working at home. They also portray the role of male actors in female-dominated craft industries as inherently exploitative. Drawing on my own fieldwork amongst crochet lace makers in Koniakow, Poland, I challenge the notion that relations between (female) artisans and (male) traders must be antagonistic or extractive. Drawing on more recent feminist approaches to economics, I examine how tensions between productive and reproductive labour, and skilled knowledge and (social and economic) capital is articulated and negotiated by different actors in Koniakow. Approaching craft production and sale as a process of commoning - rather than a commercial or extractive process, as implied by labels such as the “creative economy” or “craft industry” - I show that lace makers and traders of both genders collaborate and compete while playing different roles in the production of value for the household and community.

Keywords: gender, craft, commoning, Poland

Nicolette Makovicky is associate professor of Russian and Eastern European Studies. She has conducted long-term fieldwork in Slovakia (since 2004) and Poland (since 2008) on the influence of socio-economic reforms and EU-integration on historically embedded modes of economic activity in Central Europe, particularly artisanal crafts and pastoralism.

The Agency of a Working Hand: New Craft Movement in Contemporary Poland

The second decade of the 21st century in Poland witnessed a substantial raise of interest in craft as an alternative career choice among educated (sub)urbanities in their thirties. Some with degrees in art or design, others tired with corporate or administration careers, few with family craft traditions in their grandparent generation – they decided to pursue various craft activities, from woodworking to ceramics, from millinery to ski production. The association “Nów. Nowe Rzemiosło” (Nów. New Craft Poland) was established in 2019. They stress the uniqueness of their products resulting from “handmade characteristics”, by which they don’t necessarily mean handiwork, but rather a small-scale production and human-operated machinery. Despite all the burden of operating a small firm, lacking the institutional support in form of dedicated grant programmes, they deeply cherish their career choice when they finally can get to work hands on, feeling the agency of their skilled bodies and witnessing the material becoming a craft object of their making.

Tim Ingold described anthropology as studying *with* people and learning *from* them, while ethnography would be a study *of* people and learning *about* them. My relationship with the “new craft” in Poland is a mixture of the two. As an anthropologist of making, I have been learning from them and trying my hand at some of the techniques; I co-curated *with* them exhibitions *about* them; I wrote texts to their catalogues...Finally, I have recently taken part in establishing a grant competition programme focused on supporting contemporary craft, operated by a private family foundation. What I would like to offer is a hands-on ethnography of the “new craft” in contemporary Poland, grounded in my anthropology of craft as knowledge.

Keywords: craft knowledge, agency, generation gap, New Craft Poland

Ewa Klekot is a cultural anthropologist, translator, curator, professor at SWPS University's Design Institute. She is interested in an interdisciplinary combination of liberal arts and social sciences with design and artistic projects, both in research as well as in education. Her current area of research concerns the anthropology of making and related cognition modes—skills, embodied knowledge, materials, and processes—as well as manufacturing traditions versus intangible heritage.

Intellectual Property Rights, Constructions of Authorship and the Protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are often criticized for being based on an European understanding of authorship as an individual creative process that privileges certain forms of cultural expressions while disregarding others. James Boyle (1996, 125) describes the Western concept of authorship as “a gate through which one must pass in order to acquire intellectual property rights [...] a gate that tends disproportionately to favour the developed countries’ contribution to world science and culture”. The Western bias of IPR is particularly problematic in relation to indigenous rights and the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, such as crafts and fabrics. Recently, UN organizations like WIPO and UNESCO, have explored the possibilities to protect such traditional cultural resources in international IP-legislation like copyright, trademark and geographic indicators.

As a response to this, some academics and activists point to the problems that arise if we try to apply IP legislations that emphasize individuality, originality and commodification on traditional cultural expressions, that are often seen as transgenerational, cultural resources held by the community. I argue that this discussion is relevant not only to indigenous cultures but potentially applies to many modes of creating and sharing that do not align with the basic ideas of IP, such as heritage based craft communities. This presentation will discuss how attempts to apply IPR as a universal form of protection for cultural production and consumption raises questions regarding the relation between tradition and innovation; authenticity and modernity; creativity and craftsmanship and the individual and the collective.

Keywords: intellectual property rights, authorship, traditional cultural expressions, creativity, crafts

Martin Fredriksson is associate professor at the Department of Culture and Society (Tema Q) at Linköping University, Sweden, where he conducts studies the intersections of intellectual property rights, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and postcoloniality. He has published extensively about copyright history and the politics of piracy. He is head of Linköping University's undergraduate program in Global studies.

Linn Sigrid Bratland

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway, linn.s.bratland@usn.no

Hare's Paw and Micro Weld – Exploring the Driving Forces Behind Technological Implementation in Silversmithing Practices

Ancient techniques and hand tools form the basis of silversmithing practices. Nevertheless, technological implementation is not absent. Tools like Hare's Paws and simple iron and wooden constructions are used alongside advanced mechatronic technology, such as data-driven micro welds, laser cutters, and 3D printers. This project explores the driving forces behind technological implementations, but also which technological innovations to do without.

Keywords: traditional craft, mechatronics, technology, preservation, development

Linn Sigrid Bratland is a lecturer at the Department of Traditional Arts and Traditional Music, University of South-Eastern Norway, besides working as a self-employed silversmith. She teaches basic goldsmith techniques as well as enamel and chiselling, but also theories of science related to craft, identity, rituals and ornamentation. Bratland is currently involved in a doctoral research project in culture studies at the same university, under the subject '*Traditional Craft and Technology*'.

Tajda Jerkič, Veronika Zavratnik

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“I just Love Doing This”: Crafting Beyond Heritage

The paper explores how young people engaged in various forms of handicraft in Ljubljana, Slovenia, experience and give meaning to their practices. Rather than situating these activities within an institutional framework or a heritage discourse, the research focuses on broader and contemporary contexts: the motivations for making, the values attached to craft, the ways in which knowledge is transmitted, time management, personal economies, and the role of social ties.

By following the everyday routines of several young people who describe themselves as crafters, makers or artisans, we examine how craftwork is embedded in everyday life and how it shapes their realities. Particular attention is paid to the influence of the pandemic, the emergence of online communities and the role of digital platforms such as YouTube and Instagram in the dissemination of knowledge and inspiration.

Keywords: youth, handicrafts, acquisition of knowledge, (online) communities, Ljubljana

Tajda Jerkič is a researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She is currently working on a regional EU project *Commheritour*. Her research interests include work, handicrafts and lifestyle migrations.

Veronika Zavratnik is assistant professor and a researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Her research interests include material culture, handicrafts, and the environment.

Jasna Fakin Bajec

The Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia, jasna.fakin@zrc-sazu

Handicraft Heritage as a Tool for Addressing the Challenges of Adolescence and Aging

Based on the results of the project *Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer* (Municipality of Ajdovščina, LAS Vipava Valley, 2022/23) and the presentation of activities in the Creative Space Garaža in Ajdovščina, the author will highlight the significance of handicraft heritage in fostering youth creativity, experiential and cross-curricular learning as well as intergenerational collaboration. Through personal stories and experiences shared by bearers of handicraft and technical knowledge, the socio-cultural role of heritage in addressing the challenges of adolescence and ageing — such as depression, stress, loneliness and dependence on modern technologies — will be discussed. Furthermore, handicraft heritage provides valuable opportunities for the development of important skills such as perseverance, patience, precision and a positive attitude towards the natural and social world. These qualities can also foster the development of an eco-system approach which builds on the people-centred approach within heritage studies.

Keywords: handicrafts, technological skills, education, well-being, networking

Jasna Fakin Bajec is a researcher at the Institute for Cultural and Memory Studies at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and a lecturer at the University of Nova Gorica, School of Humanities. Her research focuses on the socio-political, economic and developmental significance of cultural heritage in the contemporary world; the development of participatory methods and tools for establishing an integrated approach to the safeguarding of cultural heritage; the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised groups in heritage practices; and the ways in which cultural and human rights are preserved in the development of cultural practices. She conducts research and implements theoretical findings in the field of cultural studies in the Karst region and Vipava Valley.

