TRADITIONAL WOODWORKING AND BUILDING CRAFTS IN VILJANDI COUNTY IN 2008

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Photo on back cover – A sample prepared by Priit Retsep to use as teaching aid in an introductory class on how to start weaving a basket. Abja-Vanamõisa village of the municipality of Abja. Photo by Priit Peterson (2008).
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Introduction

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The mission of the Department of Native Estonian Crafts is to take an active part in the practice of culture with a view to promoting values that contribute to strengthening and renewing Estonia’s regional and native identities and traditions. The department sets great store by socially and ecologically responsible action aimed at preserving and promoting the techniques and skills of traditional crafts, and by reintegrating these into the manufacture of various utility articles.

From the 2005 Strategic Plan of the Department of Native Estonian Crafts of Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu

It is our mission at the Department of Native Estonian Crafts\(^1\) of Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu to preserve and promote local crafts traditions. In our day-to-day work, progress toward

\(^1\) This is an unofficial translation of the department’s Estonian name (Rahvusliku käsitöö osakond) – transl.
this aim is hindered by considerable practical problems. Where can students find craftsmen skilled in a traditional craft? Will those craftsmen be willing to teach their craft, or to provide data for research? Where can one find competent teachers and academic supervisors? What can we tell those who are calling or writing to us, asking for the contacts of a master of one or the other traditional craft?

These and many other questions and concerns cannot be brushed off with a quick reply, or resolved over a short term. Actually, many of the questions have never been properly asked in the first place, and – as the reader will see in the next chapter – may prove exceedingly hard to formulate, let alone solve.

There is little hard-and-fast information available in the area of native Estonian crafts. Research in the field has to date chiefly focused on craftsmen’s products, rather than the skills required to make these. Yet it is clear that in order to teach students about a craft, one needs to have mastered the techniques involved oneself. Unfortunately, during the last decades, the studies that have been conducted in Estonia concerning the native crafts have all but neglected the process of craftwork – the skills and techniques involved. In part, this may be due to significant difficulties encountered in defining the field – it is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish between recreational and professional involvement, between hobby and business practice – let alone to provide a sufficiently clear definition of crafts as such. Nevertheless, the increasing interest of the general public in traditional crafts, and a demand for courses in these, show that traditional crafts are an important source of identity and a significant factor in the economic life of a large number of Estonian households.

The following is intended to lay out some general reflections that will help the reader understand the central theme of this book – the collection of information about people possessing an inherited set of skills in a traditionally male craft.
Introduction

The collection took place as part of the project entitled “The Development of a Crafts Cluster in Viljandi County”, carried out by the Department of Native Estonian Crafts of Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu. The project is supported and coordinated by the Enterprise Estonia Foundation in the framework of the Development Programme of Regional Colleges as Local Centres of Competence, implemented under the aegis of the Estonian Ministry of the Interior. The broader aim of the project is to promote and develop the field of native crafts specifically in Viljandi County. The project comprises the following actions:

1. Developing advanced training and retraining courses for log builders.
2. Launching a traditional woodworking course at Olustvere School of Land Economy and Services.
3. Introducing log building as a trade speciality in Viljandi United Vocational Schools.
4. Launching the speciality of native Estonian textiles at Olustvere School of Land Economy and Services.
5. Setting up a research centre for inherited Estonian technologies.

The present book is a product of Action 5 of the project. Work in relation to that action focused on establishing contact with craftsmen possessing inherited skills. The principles of collecting information about those craftsmen are of direct relevance to the educational aims and needs of Viljandi Culture Academy. The theoretical part of the approaches and explorations outlined in the following chapters is a natural outgrowth of the need to reflect on what we do, to link it to a broader scientific, societal and international foundation – in other words, of the need to self-reflect and to provide a clear structure for our work.

Thus, according to the principal idea of the project, collecting information on skilled craftsmen was to serve a broader societal and
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educational interest, and above all, to help improve the internal coherence of the field of inherited crafts and contribute to its development. At the moment, cooperation and awareness of each other’s work is similarly wanting among individual craftsmen, small cooperatives (such as village handicrafts associations) and larger organisations (for instance, trade associations, educational institutions running curricula that include courses in crafts). There is little information exchange between these parties, and projects susceptible to benefit everybody involved may easily be delayed for years, because the stakeholders are busy ‘putting out fires’ or doing other things that promise results in the short term. As a result of all of the above, very little research and development work is done in the field. This sad realisation is valid for crafts in general, and for men’s trades in particular. Thus, it was only natural that we should start our work by focusing on the latter.

In order to develop our research capacity, we need international cooperation. Such cooperation is often made difficult by the fact that most of the know-how regarding crafts in our neighbouring countries is concentrated in vocational schools and folk universities – or sometimes also in a series of widely different institutions or businesses. At the same time, most of the programmes (such as ERASMUS, LEONARDO) that support international cooperation actions focus on facilitating cooperation between educational institutions offering study opportunities of the same level. This results in considerable obstacles for cooperation between educational institutions that are active in the same field, but occupy different tiers of the educational system. Another problem lies in the ‘sparsity of nodes’ in relevant international cooperation networks, and in insufficiently close ties between these. In other words, problems on the international level rather resemble those we know so well locally. In order for cooperation to thrive, we need something that we can offer to the international – and, for that matter, Estonian – research and crafts community. The book in the reader’s hand is proposed as such an offering.
Introduction

It constitutes a snapshot of the theoretical framework employed, and the information and experience obtained in 2008 in our search for craftsmen possessing inherited skills, and in our efforts to catalogue these skills.

This above reflects the official side of the project, and has been expressed rather formally. How would the questions that we seek to answer sound if we tried to put them in vernacular terms understandable to everybody? How to find that something which an Estonian poet has dubbed the ‘free, creative and boldly soaring’ spirit, among the ‘people’ themselves? How to find the true popular culture that has little regard to prevailing authorities, or to administrative division of the fields of people’s activities? Do we know anything about it and does it know, care or require anything from us? If we do not, and it does not care, would our work serve any purpose at all?

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This book is a collaboration of all of the five authors cited in chapter headings, which makes linking a particular chapter to a particular author a mere matter of convention. In the opening chapter (Crafts Today: Theoretical Approaches, Economic and Political Context) the authors Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts and Ave Matsin inquire after the meaning of the notion ‘craft’ and ask whether it is possible to investigate crafts, and those who possess them. The authors provide a brief introduction to philosophical and scientific approaches to crafts as a form of tacit knowing. Tacit knowing, passed down from master to apprentice, is a form of knowledge that to a large extent eludes precise definition. This creates a paradox, concisely described in Polanyi’s statement, “we can know more than we can tell”. Tacit knowledge has attracted a new wave of attention in the current knowledge era, in which production requires more and more cultural competence. This post-productivist trend has now caught the eye of Europe’s cultural regions, whose communities have started to redefine traditional notions of socio-economic development to
align them with values characteristic of their regional culture – including, among other things, their cultural heritage and crafts.

In the second chapter, *Reasons and Methods of Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft: Previous Experience and Prospects*, the authors Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts, Ave Matsin and Joosep Metslang describe and explain the aims and activities of the Viljandi County Crafts Cluster. They approach collecting information about craftsmen possessing inherited skills as a fact-finding study aimed to create a map of crafts skills and social networks that could be used to create vocational courses in the crafts involved. The authors examine the concepts of ‘heritage’ and ‘an inherited craft’, and consider possible methods that can be employed to catalogue and describe crafts skills. They define heritage as a set of political selections from the past, and an inherited craft as part of our intangible heritage in the sense of the relevant UNESCO convention – a sum of the experience and skills learned as practical insights from the previous generation through joint work and action. The authors also provide a cursory overview of the work that has been done in the Nordic countries in mapping inherited crafts and collecting information on people who possess these, and in protecting and developing such crafts. A special section of the chapter gives a detailed description of the experience accumulated in these matters in Estonia. On the basis of an analysis of previous work, the authors explain the background and considerations that inform the principles elaborated in the Department of Native Estonian Crafts for collecting information on people possessing an inherited craft in Viljandi County. The authors describe the principles as essentially ‘proactive’, based on clear definitions with regard to the aim of the collection project and on meticulously following those definitions.

In the third chapter, *Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County: Elaboration of Principles and Content*, the authors Madis Rennu, Priit-Kalev Parts and
Liisi Jääts tell the story of the preparatory work and progress of the project. They explain that the Viljandi County Crafts Cluster represents a community development project whose broad aim is to promote sustainable livelihood in the community. This is a concept that cannot be reduced to an increase in the number of money transactions. The authors describe the preparatory work that preceded the fieldwork of information collection. It started with a series of steps to involve the target communities, and collect tips regarding craftsmen possessing inherited skills. The authors provide a detailed discussion of the notion of ‘a person possessing an inherited craft’. For the purposes of the project, the craft should be inherited from the previous generation, represent a sustainable livelihood, command a certain ‘mystique’ and enjoy recognition in the community. The final part of the chapter deals with data protection issues that arose in the course of the project.

In the fourth chapter, *2008 Database of Viljandi County Craftspeople Possessing Traditional Skills*, Madis Rennu describes the methods used to collect data in the field, provides a selection of preliminary results from the project and describes the practical experience obtained in the course of fieldwork. One of the principles underlying the choice of methods was their wide applicability (in terms of both geographical area and the types of crafts). Although the studies conducted in 2008 focused on the so far very poorly known traditionally male woodworking and building crafts, the methods used can also be employed, for instance, in studying the skills involved in traditionally female crafts.

In the fifth chapter (*Men’s Crafts in Viljandi County in 2008: Current Situation and Developments*), Madis Rennu describes the most interesting examples of craftsmen discovered during the project (including a producer of rye straw for thatch and a person knowing the principles of the technology of lining dug wells with cobblestones in dry masonry), and looks into craftsmen’s economic situation. Viljandi County craftsmen tend to take an optimistic view of the future and profess to be
ready to learn new skills. They are also ready to teach their craft to the younger generation, but point out that it is not easy to find an apprentice. Craftsmen appear to have adjusted to market economy relatively well, yet they still show a number of traditional attitudes. For instance, most of them frown upon advertising their own services – a true master’s work is his best advertisement, they say. Professional craftsmen tend to be relatively individualistic in that they do not collaborate much, and tend to mistrust unskilled help. The picture is quite different among amateur and semiprofessional craftsmen, as well as those engaged in crafts directly related to tourism (such as the manufacture of various traditional water-going vessels). Here cooperation in various forms is the buzzword, and the Internet its medium of choice.

At the end of the chapter, the author raises a problem that came up repeatedly during fieldwork, and can be summarised as follows: “Women do handicrafts – men perform work”. Although considering crafts through the gender prism was not among the aims of the project described in this chapter, it stood out that in the case of women, the rewards of craftwork were often less tangible than those received by male craftsmen. A considerable part of the remuneration of a female craftsperson is made up of what might be termed ‘psychological currency’ (recognition by the community, inclusion in social networks). Female craftspersons tend to focus as much on various sideline activities (teaching their craft, writing projects related to it) as on the sale of their products. Still, it seems that the trends in male crafts have recently changed, and craftsmen’s awareness of post-productivist models and the benefits of cooperation appears to be rising. This, in turn, means novel requirements and challenges for the makers of cultural and economic policies that have implications for the crafts.

In the final chapter, Joosep Metslang provides an overview of the changes in traditionally male log building crafts in Estonia during the 20th century. He attempts to recreate an insider’s view of the history of
building in Estonia and in Viljandi County by introducing the reader to the views of the builders themselves. The chapter is based on discussions with informants as well as on written sources. An interesting source of information is provided by the hidden traces left by builders on their work, such as names scratched on structural timbers or hidden surfaces of buildings, or a vodka bottle laid in the masonry. Although the 20th century may seem a story of the decline of log building, that tradition has never been completely broken, even though it has been forced to make major adjustments as a function of the times. Thus, the economic decline that came with World War II, and the Soviet occupation of Estonia, provided a fresh impetus to this building technology that is so well suited to reusing old material. Yet another economic downturn, which set in after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, combined with the rise in people’s awareness of their native identity, again had an invigorating effect on log building. In the 21st century, log building has become a viable industry, enriched and improved by competition with manmade construction materials and modern building technologies.
1. Crafts Today: Theoretical Approaches, Economic and Political Context

Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts, Ave Matsin

The central theme of the book at hand is crafts and craftsmen. Yet what is a craft and why should we study those who possess it? Without providing at least some definitive answers to these questions, the foundations of our entire research project would crumble and the mission of the Department of Native Estonian Crafts (preservation of inherited crafts) would be in jeopardy.

The idea of crafts as a distinctive phenomenon worthy of investigation is not new in academic circles. Nevertheless, it has not received sufficient attention so far. In this chapter, we will try to sketch a framework for such a study – to clarify the concepts attached, and to find theoretical support and inspiration for interpreting the data we have gathered on inhabitants of Viljandi County possessing inherited crafts.

Tacit knowing and other vivid descriptions of possessing a craft

The concept of tacit knowing was broached in academic circles by the philosopher Michael Polanyi (1891–1976). He argued that, in addition to facts, knowledge also relates to the performance of various acts that require skillful or tacit/implicit/hidden knowing.
Tacit knowing manifests itself in dexterity, skill and craftsmanship. It cannot be acquired by reading a book. ‘Knowing’ as skill is acquired through practice and interaction with the environment. Such knowing does not easily submit to verbal expression. Often, we may even not be aware of having it – according to Polanyi, “we can know more than we can tell”.

Skillful knowing and skillful doing are closely related. They are the key ingredients in attaining an accomplished, masterly performance, either in a theoretical or a practical pursuit. A skillful performance succeeds if its underlying rules are obeyed without a conscious effort (see Polanyi 2002: 49-50).

Polanyi also argued that it is impossible to provide an exhaustive description of experiential phenomena such as a pianist’s ‘touch’. From the maxim “we can know more than we can tell”, he inferred that there is a considerable body of knowledge that is passed on by hidden, ineffable means such as between a master and apprentice, as opposed to formal descriptions (e.g., a doctor’s prescription). This limits the spread of skills to the skill possessor’s circle of personal contacts. It also explains why crafts tend to be transferred from one country to another mostly by resettling groups of craftsmen or artisans, and also why a craft forgotten for a single generation usually remains irrecoverable (see Polanyi 2002: 51–53).

Different authors have brought different research interests to the subject, and have offered various interpretations of the notion of craft as a special kind of knowledge. For instance, Jonas Frykman (1999), a contemporary Swedish ethnographer, stresses that ‘cultural competence’ and ‘wordless knowing’ is by no means something exclusive to indigenous or preindustrial societies, and applies equally to scholars and scientists. “To be a child who is raised to be a scholar or scientist does not only mean reading Homer, solving integral equations or studying the mechanisms of government. It means knowing these things implicitly, in the same way that the son of a fisherman knows how to sail a boat or a farmer’s wife knows how to cook.” (translated from Frykman 1999: 77)
1. Crafts Today

In English-language literature on anthropology, we often encounter the concept of indigenous knowledge, which generally covers traditional knowledge and skills of indigenous peoples, thus overlapping with the terms ‘local knowledge’, ‘folk knowledge’, ‘traditional knowledge’. Although these may sometimes be interpreted to convey slight differences of meaning, they are often used interchangeably.

It is interesting to note that the idea of tacit or wordless knowing is gaining popularity not only in niche disciplines and lofty academic debates, but also in some very modern and ‘in’ fields, such as organisation and innovation studies. It is suggested that human societies have entered a new developmental stage – the Knowledge Era. Now, in order to survive, organisations must ever be on their toes, constantly learning and renewing themselves. Similarly, individuals are required to possess outstanding social and information management skills and an excellent learning ability, since the useful life-span of their formal education has become very short (see Davenport, Prusak 1998). Against this background, the study of crafts as such on both micro and macro levels appears a bold endeavour likely to prove a wise choice before long.

Cultural competence and capital

Several theorists have stressed that 20th century capitalism was characterised by the need to market goods based on their symbolic rather than practical value. It is seen as a reaction to problems of capital accumulation in post-Fordian economy. For example, failure to create differences between standardised mass products, chain companies, or supermarkets, means failing to make them marketable (Harvey 1994). If high productivity is not enough to give a competitive edge to a car model or real estate project, new marketing strategies will have to be found (post-Fordian/postproductivist condition).
One excellent opportunity to improve the synergy between production and marketing is to create themed environments (Harvey 1994: 155–156). The emergence of heritage industry as a sector of culture industry can also be regarded as part of this process. The goal of themed environments is always to encourage consumption (Fotsch 2004: 783; Graham et al. 2000: 20). Construction of themed environments has become a recognised part of the development of regional brands (Ahponen 1996: 111–115). It also manifests itself in the search for a ‘regional identity’ from the region’s culture and its natural and cultural heritage (for a longer discussion of the subject, see e.g. Parts 2003, 2004a, 2004b).

Such trends indicate that we need to integrate cultural analysis into the discussion of modern market economy. Sharon Zukin, for example, explains the popularity of themed environments with the emergence of new, post-Fordian consumption patterns, where ‘real cultural capital’ plays an increasingly important role and where consumption experience is highly mediated by a new type of extremely professional culture producers. These new producers shape the consumption reflexes of higher social strata, which can be acquired by conscious effort and guided learning, by consuming products and services mediated by the cultural elite, e.g. art, handcrafted products, themed environments, etc. (Zukin 1990: 45–46).

**Cultural heritage and traditional skills on the postproductivist market**

In Europe, cultural heritage has emerged as a vessel of regional identity and the engine of regional economy (tourism, local traditional products, etc.). Why is that? David Lowenthal (1996) has suggested that the reasons lie in aging populations and increased life expectancy, rising immigration flows, urbanisation, increased fear of technology and technology-induced rapid changes.
These changes have also influenced the economy and politics. In 1990, for example, the EU redefined its priorities in the area of rural development. Nature conservation, tourism, landscape management and the strengthening of communities were added to production-intensive agriculture, which was no longer top of the agenda. Previously, farmers received support under the Common Agricultural Policy to grow agricultural produce that would then be shipped to distant consumers. Now people come from faraway places **consume** the basic elements of countryside settings that, with the change in outlook, have become valuable – i.e. the environment, scenic landscapes, heritage, local customs and products (Gray 2000: 44).

This initiative of the EU’s policymakers is related to the long-standing European social process manifesting itself as regionalism. In some cases, local character is emphasised in the interests of resuscitating the economy of a peripheral region, in other cases, local socio-economic development is redefined to fit local character. The EU’s support to regionalism is also evident in its increased funding of regional programmes (e.g. the LEADER programme), which are aimed at turning the regions’ attention to their own local resources, including cultural heritage (Ray 1998: 5).

Given this background, the notion of postproductivist countryside has been gaining popularity in rural sociology. Opinions regarding it range from sharply critical to superlative. Commodification of landscapes, knowledge, skills and activities is observed to invade rural life and cultural heritage (see e.g. Graham et al. 2000: 143–144). Commodification is often perceived as an agent of global homogenisation – it is thought to reduce differences between local communities, destroying or marginalising local knowledge and customs.

However, the process of commodification can also be regarded as a development based on giving new meaning to skills, phenomena or locations, on rethinking existing cultural elements and utilising them as a new resource (Perkins 2006: 247). In this view, the local community
is perceived as an important source of knowledge, and its experience and skills as the foundation upon which the region’s own identity can be built.

In view of the above, the study of skills on the level of individuals and trade groupings, as well as on that of organisations and communities, presents itself as an endeavour that promises considerable dividends in the future.

References


1. Crafts Today


2. Reasons and Methods for Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft: Previous Experience and Prospects

Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts, Ave Matsin, Joosep Metslang

The purpose of this chapter is to throw some light on the process of collecting information on individuals possessing an inherited craft as part of the Viljandi County Craft Cluster project. The authors will also attempt to link the search to a wider cultural and political context related to the protection of intangible cultural heritage. The chapter will recapitulate the preparatory work for formulating the principles of collection activities, the collection fieldwork, and the comparisons conducted and analyses performed in relation to it. The authors will also suggest some ideas for future collection work and discuss additional information gained during fieldwork and subsequently.

What is heritage?

‘Heritage’ is by origin a legal term to denote property that descends to an heir. It is only in the 20th century that the term has acquired additional connotations that link it to values derived from the historical experience of a society or community (Graham et al 2000: 1–3).
The identification of an object or phenomenon as belonging to cultural heritage depends on the observer, and may be disagreed with by another observer, even if the other observer is part of the same group or community. It seems that cultural heritage is perceived as such through membership in the community that regards and values it as such. Attempts to provide a conclusive definition of cultural heritage by means of a finite number of common denominators are most likely doomed to fail, since the notion – or, for some, vague idea – of ‘cultural heritage’ is linked through “family resemblance” (to use Wittgenstein’s famous metaphor (Wittgenstein 1968: 32), to a wide variety of very different things. Perhaps it is still sufficiently to the point to say that heritage phenomena are characterised by the use of past symbols to represent modern value systems: *heritage is a political selection from the past* (Parts 2007a,b; see also Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 370; cf also Cohen 1993: 98–103).

The UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 defines cultural heritage by reference to monuments, buildings, and sites that are at least partially man-made. In order to qualify for the designation ‘cultural heritage’, these must be of universal value. The fact that the convention specifically refers certain scientific disciplines, gives the relevant academic circles a considerable say in assessing the presence or absence of this ‘universal value’. At the same time, in the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005), the emphasis has shifted to the intangible part of cultural heritage – the sense of cultural identity that is essentially local and includes, among other things, traditional skills and lifestyles.

Protection of intangible cultural heritage on an international level is a relatively recent phenomenon – the UNESCO convention to protect intangible cultural heritage was adopted only in 2003. The convention defines intangible cultural heritage as follows:
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The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (Article 2 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage).

Estonia has acceded to the UNESCO conventions mentioned above, and has thus assumed a moral responsibility to protect both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This responsibility has been already mentioned in several Acts of Estonian Parliament, although in most of these it is simply cited without any definitions being provided. For example, the Republic of Estonia Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Auditing Act stipulates that projects falling into the category of those having a “significant environmental impact”, must also be assessed with regard to their impact on cultural heritage. It is most likely that the legal definition (or lack thereof) of cultural heritage will soon become a high-stakes issue to be fought out in the courts.

What is an inherited craft?

Michael Polanyi’s aforementioned concept of tacit knowing has given rise to a number of theories, which have also found application

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1 Original Estonian title: Keskkonnamõju hindamise ja keskkonnajuhtimissüsteemi seadus – transl.
in the study of inherited crafts. In Nordic countries, the discussion most frequently revolves around the concept of *handlingsboren kunnskap*, which is literally translated there into English as ‘action-borne knowledge’. Related concepts include ‘learning by doing’, ‘situated learning’ and ‘tacit knowing’.

*Norsk Handverksutvikling* (the NHU, Norwegian Crafts Development Agency) explains that *handlingsboren kunnskap*, knowledge acquired by practice, means the the sum of experience and skill, inherited from the previous generation in the form of day-to-day activities, activity patterns and practical insights attained through joint work, imitation and practical training (Martinussen *s.a*).

Although “family resemblance” is still the only connection between various inherited crafts, our team, while preparing this book, concluded that the NHU definition offered above is sufficient for the purposes of our project.

**Cataloguing inherited crafts and collecting information about individuals possessing these: international experience**

As part of this project, we were looking to make contact with institutions, movements and individuals engaged in inherited crafts. As far as collecting information about inherited crafts, learning an inherited craft, working with craftsmen, networking with the crafts community and interpreting crafts development and processes is concerned, the richest source of inspiration that we found was the NHU. It was founded in 1987 in cooperation between the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs and the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research to preserve, pass on and develop crafts as a form of knowledge, as a means of expression and as trades.
One of the NHU’s primary means of achieving the aforementioned goals is the National Register of Craftsmen and Craft Enterprises (Det nasjonale registeret over håndverkere). There are currently approximately 2500 registered craftsmen in Norway. The purpose of the register is to promote skilled craftsmen, to offer them better opportunities to find work, and to facilitate the development of professional cooperation ties.

In addition to maintaining the register, the NHU engages in crafts research and development. Special attention is paid to endangered crafts, but also to the crafts and inherited knowledge that is needed to protect and preserve architectural and cultural monuments, e.g. blacksmithing, dry masonry, traditional log building, knowledge of traditional materials.

For teaching crafts and preserving them for future generations, the NHU has developed its own “triangle model”. The model is based on master-apprentice relationship, where the master is responsible for the training of the apprentice. According to the model, that traditional relationship is expanded to include a third party, who is instructed to act as an observer, describing and recording the process for future use (eventually also by the apprentice himself or herself).

It is appropriate here to mention a few of the NHU’s actual projects. One is the millstone project in Hyllestad (2006) – a series of practical experiments related to millstone cutting was conducted in an old stone quarry during three years. Another is the ice cutting project that introduced an old master, who in his youth had earned a living as an ice cutter, was introduced to a motivated apprentice – who now has founded his own company, and specialises in selling ice blocks for sculptures and installations (from the interviews conducted by P.-K. Parts and J. Metslang at the headquarters of Norsk Riksantikvariet in Oslo on September 25, 2008).
The NHU maintains a separate register (Handverksregisteret) for rare and protected crafts. The register also includes information about courses in such crafts, and about companies and masters holding teaching licences. To support such crafts, even if they are extremely rare, the NHU organises vocational training courses, taking into account both commercial and cultural considerations. It is interesting to note that arrangements have been made that permit official recognition to be extended in certain cases to craft studies conducted in informal settings. Thus, individuals who wish to learn a rarefied trade in which no formal courses are offered, can acquire the know-how and skills of that trade by working for a master of the trade, or in an enterprise in which the trade is practised. Apprentices can be both employee and student at the same time, and are entitled to take out student loans on the same basis as regular students.

The NHU also administers a scholarship scheme for craftsmen. The scholarship (Stipendiater i håndverk) was launched in 1995, and is awarded to craftsmen for a three-year period of study and professional development. The NHU currently supports three craftsmen (a blacksmith, a carpenter and a traditional dress maker). The scholarship system is also a way to officially recognise the continuing education of craftsmen (awards of apprenticeship certificates) and to ensure them a status equal to that of other professions (from the interviews conducted by P.-K. Parts and J. Metslang at the headquarters of the NHU in Lillehammer on September 24, 2008; NHU, Martinussen s.a.).

It may be worthwhile to consider adapting the NHU’s model in Estonia. Its cost, however, is likely to prove prohibitive in the Estonian context. Thus, a simple transposition of the NHU model could mean insurmountable funding difficulties, due to the need to involve observers/recorders. An aspect of the model that could successfully be implemented in Estonia is the support scheme for individual training of craftsmen. We could offer vocational education for those who otherwise would have difficulties in obtaining a formal education in their speciality. In Nordic
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countries, where large distances are a serious problem, similar principles have been applied in providing vocational education to young people living in distant locations (e.g. the Finnish apprenticeship studies framework *Oppisopimuskoulutus*).

**Cataloguing inherited crafts and collecting information about individuals who possess them: previous experience in Estonia**

As part of the preparatory work for building a database of Viljandi County inhabitants who possess an inherited craft, we consulted various databases compiled on Estonian craftsmen during the last decade. We discovered fourteen databases of interest, thirteen of which were partially or completely web-based. Online databases on traditional craftsmen differ from one another in the information they contain: some only provide contacts, others only focus on selected trades, some are public, some are intended for internal use only. The material is therefore assorted and uneven.

A group of the databases that we encountered can be described as **business directories**. These offer contact information of masters of particular trades, including a listing of their skills and of the services they offer. The principal purpose of such directories is to help clients find the craftsmen they need.

Another group is constituted by **databases and webpages that, in addition to fulfilling a directory function, also seek to promote cultural heritage and traditions in general**. They differ from the previous group in that the information they contain is partially or wholly gathered by means of fieldwork.

For example, the research project entitled “Promotion and Development of Enterpreneurship Based on Local Cultural Traditions in
Setomaa” is probably one of the most thorough studies of its kind in Estonia. As part of this project, the local crafts traditions were also studied. The aim of the project was, “... in addition to factual information on craftsmen and their trades, to provide information on the attitudes and opinions of craftsmen with regard to the prospects of their trades, on their readiness to pass on their knowledge, on endangered trades, etc.” (translated from the Study to Assess the Current Situation of Crafts and Craftsmen in Setomaa, 2006: 3). It was one of the most carefully planned and well-executed research projects on Estonian traditional crafts, which also paid attention to the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement of local livelihoods.

Smaller databases have been compiled by the non-profit corporation Vanaajamaja (Vintage House), see “Log-Building Traditions and Their Revitalisations. A Study”, 1998, by the Estonian National Museum, Viljandi Culture Academy, the Estonian Open Air Museum and several other non-profit corporations, and as part of several specific projects. The Training and Development Centre for Native Estonian Culture, which coordinates the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Estonia, has begun to put together a list of intangible cultural heritage, which will also include information on Estonian craftspeople (Põll 2007: 63, Grünberg 2008).

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2 The Seto are an indigenous Orthodox ethnic minority in South East Estonia and across the border in Russia. The Seto cultural space has been nominated for the UNESCO list of masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity.

3 Original Estonian title: Palkmajaehitustraditsioonide uurimine ja taaselustamine – transl.
Principles of collecting information about individuals possessing an inherited craft in Viljandi County: background and prospects

As the above-given overview of databases of Estonian traditional craftsmen suggests, information about cultural heritage can be collected, and objects and practices identified as belonging to cultural heritage, without previously defining what constitutes that heritage. Many of those active in collecting heritage information have considered it possible, or even justified, to dispense with definitions, and to approach heritage in an *ex post* manner: anything that is actually collected, must by virtue of that very fact belong to heritage. In such a case, the concept of heritage is only limited by the extent of our financial, perceptual and mnemonic resources. This constitutes an increasingly acute problem of the method in question – a problem that, however, is not widely realised (see e.g. Lowenthal 2004; Parts 2007a,b). In fact, the method remains very popular to date.

Acknowledging the limits of our resources and the goals of our activities, we made a clear choice in favour of a deductive or proactive approach in our work to collect information on craftsmen skilled in inherited crafts in Viljandi County. We tried to define what we were looking for, and what we wanted to know, as precisely as possible. We also sought to establish a clear goal that would be achieved by each item of information to be collected. In other words, we decided to establish a set of principles to guide our collection effort. The lack of flexibility inherent in this method was and is hopefully alleviated by the creative approach that we adopted in fieldwork and data processing.

In embarking on our quest to collect and systematise information on inherited skills and craftsmen possessing these, we were not treading on altogether unknown ground – although our predecessors appear
to have left us plenty of untilled patches. For example, the world’s foremost institution to deal with cultural heritage – the UNESCO – has for decades been more active in designating than actually defining that heritage.

Still, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage does offer certain footholds that proved helpful in defining our area of study. Thus, according to the convention, intangible cultural heritage also includes social practices, practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003: 2).

However, this still only provides us with a general reference and, in all probability, is not intended to be interpreted narrowly. In fact, conceivable definitions of ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘traditional’ as used in the convention appear to be insufficient to cover all areas of our interest. Thus, we also wanted to include in our collection project certain more recent inherited crafts and skills (yet, according to UNESCO definition, we can only speak of ‘heritage’ in the case of practices that go back at least two or three generations, i.e. 50–60 years).

While discussing the principles of our collection strategy, we considered it worthwhile include in it skills that are not necessarily regarded as crafts, e.g. scythe mowing, horsemanship, sheep husbandry, etc. For us, these represented inherited skills that are sometimes directly related to one or another craft, and that, in some cases, could even be a prerequisite for learning or practising a craft or a trade. Moreover, some crafts have become intertwined with modern skills involving computers, with chainsaw use skills, etc. Needless to say, such combinations may also prove very interesting.
2. Reasons and Methods for Collecting Information About Individuals
Possessing an Inherited Craft

References


Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts, Ave Matsin, Joosep Metslang


2. Reasons and Methods for Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft


3. Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County: Elaboration of Principles and Content

Madis Rennu, Priit-Kalev Parts, Liisi Jääts

Background and evolution of the project

Collecting information in Viljandi County about individuals who possess an inherited craft is aimed at revitalising crafts as trades and as a cultural phenomenon, and to build social networks to support them. At the moment, craft-related knowledge exists in fragmented form across a series of disparate databases, institutions and individuals, and in certain cases artefacts that in practice cannot be reproduced. The situation is particularly dismal in relation to traditionally male crafts, in which the many older generation masters are reluctant to communicate with colleagues, let alone cooperate with educational institutions and local authorities.

The Viljandi County Crafts Cluster represents a community development project whose broad aim is to promote sustainable livelihood in the community. This is a concept that cannot be reduced to an increase in the number of transactions involving money. For Chambers and Conway, “a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is
sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term” (Chambers & Conway 1991: 6; for a discussion of applicability of the concept in Estonia, see also Parts 2004a,b.)..

A perfectly sustainable livelihood, if conceivable at all, is at least very difficult to find. After all, any livelihood is ultimately connected to the global economy, which includes an endless variety of practices that need not be sustainable in each and every case. However, this theoretical concern should not be seen as justification for giving up reflecting on, and aspiring to, more sustainable livelihoods.

The fact that an open and cooperating social network can create a positive economic effect, amongst other things in the field of men’s crafts, becomes evident, for example, in the success story of the Montana log home cluster (Rosenfeld, Swanson: 2004) or, in South Estonia, the network of log building businesses that has formed around the town of Räpina, and represents a true cluster in the classical sense of economic geography. Of the organisations of the Räpina ‘School’, let us just mention the log building firms Hobbiton and Saulerman, and the various projects ranging from business ventures to training events, publishing (Uus, Lõbu 2007) and charitable work (consulting for homeowners).

Preparatory work

One of the first steps taken in relation to the project of developing a crafts network in Viljandi County was to put together a research team specialising in inherited technologies at the Department of Native Estonian Crafts. By the end of 2007, we had a number of specialists who had previously been involved with the crafts. Currently the team consists of Liisi Jääts, Joosep Metslang, Madis Rennu and the team
3. Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County

leader Priit-Kalev Parts. Other contributors include Ave Matsin, Signe Susi and Urmas Volmer (the latter two as project managers). Within the project, the team has adopted the name of ‘Research Centre for Inherited Technologies’. We have been considering establishing the centre as a separate institution, formally unaffiliated with the Department of Native Estonian Crafts. The current working title of the intended institution is Pärandoskuste Asutis (Institute of Inherited Crafts).

Before starting the collection of information about craftsmen possessing inherited skills, we held a series of meetings with specialist researchers from the Estonian Open Air Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the University of Tartu and, naturally, Viljandi Culture Academy. The first of these meetings took place in the Estonian Open Air Museum in December 2007, and resulted in a provisional outline of tasks for the first fieldwork sessions, draft survey forms for craftsmen possessing inherited skills and a distribution of preliminary assignments necessary for preparing the field.

The second meeting, intended for a broader circle of stakeholders, took place on March 2, 2008. We had invited a wide range of guests professionally involved with the crafts, from representatives of educational institutions to those of local museums and municipal authorities of Viljandi County, and a number of craftspeople as well. At the meeting, we presented the idea of the crafts cluster, described the results of the background studies and outlined the plan of the project. We also heard out the opinions and recommendations of stakeholders.

The Olustvere meeting confirmed our assumption that despite increased social recognition of inherited crafts and related knowledge, people (even those having an immediate interest in the matter) have a relatively poor grasp of the issues involved, and find actual information about crafts and crafts-related knowledge very hard to come by. We decided that our first task was to make information on active craftspeople and budding trade associations publicly available and to ensure that the information is constantly updated.
The participants of the meeting pointed out the need for basic and continuing training in the crafts, and deplored the absence of crafts development activities. They also said that training as well as commercial projects in rural areas are often hindered by the excessive modesty of the craftsmen themselves, as well as by their lack of entrepreneurial spirit and their risk-averse attitudes. Businesspeople complained that craftsmen often display a blatant lack of discipline concerning deadlines and agreements. It was also mentioned that accomplished masters are often so set in their ways as to refuse to try anything new at all.

Another point brought forward at the meeting was the need to teach consumers about the products manufactured by using inherited technologies. Not every craftsman is fully up to the task of explaining to the customer the details of proper use and economic maintenance of various traditional construction materials or other products. What is more, the craftsman’s explanation may often lack scientific authority. This is where academic institutions can help.

These were the principal observations and recommendations of the crafts community that served as input for the project. On its own part, Viljandi Culture Academy intends to use the information collected on crafts and craftspeople to create a training environment that offers diverse opportunities for further specialisation in the area of traditional building technologies and crafts. Therefore, in elaborating the methods to be used in information collection we took into account the need for the information to be usable in studies, and also in subsequent (inherited crafts related) consulting work, and the fact that collection fieldwork would present an excellent opportunity to map training needs.
Commencement of fieldwork: initial steps

As the first step, we drew up a tip form to be used in the initial stage of the project. The need for such an instrument was suggested by the experience we had accumulated during preparatory work, and by the ideas presented and the needs and interests expressed by the stakeholders. Without an initial gathering of tips, our collection effort would have found itself in an information vacuum. The only type of information we could reasonably hope to gather on active craftsmen was first and second-hand tips.

Submitting written requests for information about active craftspeople to various institutions, and advertising in local newspapers, failed to yield any significant results. After a short period it became clear that the most efficient way of gathering information was to go and talk to local officials and activists. The method was work-intensive, but it gave us the results we needed. By the end of March, preliminary fieldwork had yielded more than 130 suggestions about potential craftsmen of interest to us.
Who should be regarded as craftsmen possessing inherited skills?

Yet whom are we to regard as a craftsperson possessing inherited skills? Defining this category was far from a simple task. On the one hand, we wished to learn about the community’s own crafts-related beliefs and values, and to respect these, on the other hand, we needed to explain the concept somehow to the informants in the initial stage of the project, if we were to get any information at all on the type of craftsmen we were interested in.

The team came to the conclusion that the community’s recognition of a person as a craftsman should have priority over any eventual defects in his or her knowing or command of the craft, even though these might adversely impact the quality of the product, especially in terms of its heritage value.

Finally, we decided to abandon strict definitions of the concept – at least before starting the actual collection fieldwork. Still, we made it our policy to familiarise our informants with the following principal criteria.

1. The craft should be inherited (learnt from parents or from somebody in the same community).
2. The craft should be sustainable.

We explained to informants that sustainability consists of several components, the simultaneous presence of all of which is not required. Important components of sustainability for us included: soundness vis-à-vis both social and natural environment, good character (which, through qualities such as perseverance, punctuality and openness, may be an important part of the work process), and a certain personal charisma. We also found that the presence of a sense of personal fulfilment would make a good sustainability test: if a person is not enjoying what he does, his work will have a hard time passing as sustainable.

3. Previous work done by the craftsman should be available for inspection.
3. Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County

This criterion chiefly serves the aim of visual documentation, yet is also likely to reveal something about the craftsman’s individual touch. Last but not least, it permits the fieldworker to verify that he or she is dealing with an actual person, and not a mythical figure.

4. Recognition of the community. The craftsperson must be sufficiently well known to local people and his or her skills should be attested by references.

5. The work methods of the craftsperson should reflect the traditional approach of native crafts.

6. In certain cases, modern folk artists – if they are genuine – can also be considered as craftspeople possessing inherited skills.

The form that we used to collect tips about craftsmen (the tip form) in the pilot stage of the project included the following fields:

1. Contact information of the craftsman (address and directions to help find it).

2. Age and education (as known to respondent, may be given in approximate terms).

3. Crafts that are (or were) practised by the craftsman, as known to respondent.

4. Respondent’s relationship with the craftsman. Has respondent commissioned work from the craftsman?

5. Respondent’s assessment of the quality and quantity of the craftsman’s products.

6. People who use the craftsman’s services.

7. Respondent’s opinion as to whether the craftsman concerned could be a good teacher.

Each respondent who provided a tip was also asked for his/her personal particulars, including contact information and his/her job or position. The information we gathered during the initial stage of the
project appears valuable in several respects, in particular in terms of understanding the broader context of inherited culture. It is interesting to note that the local officials, who due to their job duties maintained a list of local craftsmen and who proved valuable respondents in quantitative terms, had precious little to say about the roles of craftsmen in the local community. This was, fortunately, amply compensated for by the local clergy and museum staff.

In hindsight, we can say that the extra time we spent on the initial stage was fully justified. It allowed us gather valuable feedback and use it to improve the main collection form. In a way, it also reflected a methodological imperative — after all, complete listings of local craftspeople cannot be obtained from any current directory — which means we had no choice but to create one ourselves. The substantive benefits of the initial stage lie in the experience gained. This helped us ‘get into the subject’ and provided inspiration for finalising the collection form and implementing it in fieldwork.

**Gathering, sorting and preserving data**

Several questions arose in relation to the preservation and publishing of the data gathered during fieldwork. To what extent should the gathered data be made public? Whether and how should we display the gathered data? Who, to what extent and when should be given access to these data?

We discovered that although in Estonia there are no general rules on the subject, according to widely accepted practice the researcher by whom the data has been gathered retains the right of privileged use of those data even when they have been listed in the relevant archive (Korb 2005: 115).

The Good Scientific Practice in Research and Scholarship, a list of ethics rules drawn up by the European Science Foundation in
3. Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County

2000, emphasises confidentiality and the need for careful preservation of information containing personal data gathered during research performed in the humanities or social sciences, and the obligation to inform respondents of the purpose of the research and its outputs. On the other hand, fieldwork data should remain available to other researchers, who may wish to conduct additional or repeat studies using these data. The authors of the list point out that it is difficult to strike a good balance between the need to protect personal data and the need to ensure access to data for other researchers, who may wish to conduct a repeat study using the same data (paragraphs 32 and 33, Good Scientific Practice in Research and Scholarship).

We decided to compile two databases, one for public\(^1\) and the other for internal use. The latter would include information on

\(^1\) The public database can be found at www.rahvuslik.kultuur.edu.ee.

Fig. 3. The sauna of the mason Enn Laante testifies to the owner’s unconditional preference for natural materials. Kiigemäe farm in Vardja village in the municipality of Viiratsi. Photo by Madis Rennu (2008).
craftsmen who did not wish to advertise themselves publicly, and also any information that craftsmen listed in the public database wished to keep confidential. During our fieldwork in Viljandi County, we informed the respondents of the purpose of our research and of the use we had in mind for gathered material. We also explained that we would not make public any information that a respondent might wish to keep confidential. Thus, we complied with both of the requirements stated above.

Regarding the issue of access to the full dataset, we decided to grant data processing privileges to persons closely involved with the project in an official capacity. The data processors will have the discretion (and responsibility) to decide who else can access the dataset, or any part of it. We also prepared a document setting out the terms and conditions governing the use of the data, and uploaded it into the system so that any new users who wish to access confidential data will have to read and agree to the terms and conditions before they can proceed. This will ensure that anyone using data from the closed database is obligated to follow at least the basic rules governing the use of data obtained for research.

References


3. Collecting Information About Individuals Possessing an Inherited Craft in Viljandi County


4. 2008 Database of Viljandi County Craftspeople Possessing Inherited Skills

Madis Rennu

Crafts studied

In order to avoid blocking out new and interesting information, we decided to forgo strict definitions of ‘inherited skills’ and ‘craftsmen possessing inherited skills’ while defining our fieldwork methods and performing actual fieldwork. However, we could not avoid definition as such, since, as discussed in previous chapters, the notion of ‘traditionally male crafts’ does not evoke sufficiently clear associations in speakers of contemporary Estonian. For this reason, in order to clarify the aims of our research, we decided to draw up a list of the crafts that we were interested in. In the area of building crafts, our particular interests were the following.

1. Log building – the creation of new buildings, renovation of old log buildings, as well as their dismantling and re-erecting at another location.
2. Traditional timber framing. Construction of mills and other big or complex timber framed buildings, preferably using round timbers.
4. Stone masonry – construction of buildings, foundations and other structures of cobblestones and boulders, also cobblestone and boulder splitting. We also collect experiential stories about small brick factories.

5. Wooden or reed thatch roofing, including the manufacture of respective roofing materials.

6. Building insulation using traditional materials, e.g. reed mats.


8. Stove building – tile stoves, masonry and metal stoves, cooking stoves, fireplaces, sauna stoves, and also chimneys.


10. Tinsmithing – standing seam metal roofs, rain gutters, stove shells, etc.


12. Small constructions made of wood, stone or metal – fences, gates, swings, etc.

13. Other materials used in traditional construction, and the small businesses producing such materials – tar and lime, lumber mills that sell materials outside the regular product range.

14. Other traditionally male crafts related to construction work, also smaller decorative components and design.

In the area of woodworking crafts, our particular interests were the following.

1. Wooden utensils – various spoons, bowls and barrels.

2. Wooden gardening tools: brooms, rakes, etc.
3. Wooden boats – clinker-planked sailboats and dugouts (*kale* and *haabjas*), but also newer boat types.

4. Wickerwork and basketry – baskets, furniture etc.

5. Horse harnesses and other gear – sledges, carts, thills, horse bows etc.


7. Woodcarving, decorative wood burning, intarsia, objects made of birch bark.

8. Other traditional woodworking crafts.

According to our team’s preliminary field results, all crafts listed above appeared to be represented in one form or another in Viljandi County, although sometimes the craftsmen concerned were no longer actively practising.

**The survey form**

We planned our main fieldwork stage to consist of a series of specific steps. First, the survey form had to be filled out. The form started with simple questions, after which, depending on the respondent’s degree of cooperation and the extent of his meeting our criteria for craftsmen possessing inherited skills, the fieldworker would proceed to thematic sets of more specific questions.

For the purposes of our project, the most important part of the interview was the set of questions dealing with the day-to-day work of the craftsman. We decided to do that part as an in-depth interview, with a full recording and supplementary questions if necessary. For the other parts of the interview, we used multiple choice and free response questions on respective forms. Since the day-to-day work section was considered the most important, the reader will find its set of basic questions is reproduced below:
4.1. Where do you usually purchase your supplies and materials?
4.2. Do you use hired labour to manufacture your product, or outsource any part of your service?
4.2.1. What kind of tools do you use?
4.2.2. What is the proportion of manual labour in your trade? To what extent do you rely on mechanisms or automation?
4.3. To what extent (if any) have you been able to use local labour in manufacturing your product / providing your service?
4.4. How much do you think your trade contributes to the development of other local crafts?
4.5. What in your view are the prospects for your trade?
4.6. Have you had any problems in practising your trade?
4.7. Please name the crafts, products, and building skills that are particular to your region and should be preserved, developed and promoted.
4.8. In your opinion, what craft products and services are likely to make the most sales in the current market?
4.9. Are you aware of any crafts or trades that used to be practised in Viljandi County before, but have now disappeared?
4.9.1. Why do you think this has happened? Have they become outdated, or have they been replaced by a modern product/service?
4.10. Can you name any other craftsmen who also practise your trade or offer a product/service similar to yours?
4.11. Are you aware of any other craftsmen builders or woodworkers whom you know and whom we should visit?

In order to obtain the fullest possible answers to the above questions, our fieldwork manual recommended the interviewer to adopt an open and creative approach. Since the purpose of the interview was
to obtain as much information as possible about the various aspects of the day-to-day work of the interviewee, and about his skills, the drafters of the manual suggested encouraging the respondent to talk freely on these subjects. The manual expressly advised against using general (‘Yes/No’) questions and instead recommended special questions (‘How?’, ‘Why?’, ‘When?’, ‘What?’, etc. – DCPIS¹ 2008, Fieldwork Manual (Rennu, Jääts 2008)).

The manual further included a specific note regarding the case of an interviewee who appears exceptionally knowledgeable in relation to inherited technologies and thus seems of significant interest to the project. If a good rapport can be established with such a person, an additional extended and freely structured interview should be conducted with him, focusing on the technical and technology aspects of the craft or trade in question, i.e. on the details of the process of manufacturing the craft item or providing the service. The interviewers were also encouraged to remain alert for any eventual stories about how the craftsman learnt his trade or how it relates to family traditions.

The fieldwork manual emphasised that interviewers should seek to conduct the interviews in the manner of ordinary conversation. It was stressed that there are no fixed rules for accomplishing this. While training the interviewers, we encouraged them to rely on their own knowledge of building and woodworking (our interviewers were students of native Estonian construction) and instructed them to ask the craftsman about anything they should find exquisitely crafted or otherwise interesting.

Making sketches or taking photos of the craftsman’s products, and providing a verbal description of those products, was stressed as an important component of fieldwork.

¹ An acronym to denote the Database of Viljandi County Craftsmen Possessing Inherited Skills.
The database

In studies related to day-to-day work of ordinary people, it is very rare for the data collected for research purposes to be used to support the practice studied. Yet, in this research project, this practical use was exactly what we intended to achieve, both in terms of passing on practical know-how and specific skills, and facilitating the information exchange between active craftsmen and their customers. Due to data protection requirements, access to some of the information collected had to be restricted. As a result, we now have an openly accessible web page (on the website of the Department of Native Estonian Crafts of Viljandi Culture Academy) that contains contacts and other information on craftsmen who consented to the publication of these data, and an internal-use database containing information on craftsmen who declined such consent.

A selection of results

As of the beginning of September 2008, the first part of the database – the information gathered by means of the tip form – identified 128 individual craftsmen and seven small companies that, among other products, also manufacture certain traditional construction supplies (stove shells, prefabricated tinplate shapes, blacksmithed hardware) or provide specific support services (sawmills equipped with a rack saw or a bandsaw for cutting undressed boards or extra-wide floorboards) (see Rennu 2008b).

In total, interviews were conducted with 38 craftsmen. In the case of three of these, the survey form was not filled out. In five cases, the section of the interview focusing on the fourth set of questions was not recorded. Five interviewees had ceased active practise of their
trade, twenty-five practiced theirs as the primary occupation, while seven claimed that what they did should properly be called ‘tinkering’ ‘a hobby’ or ‘filling an occasional order’. Thirteen craftsmen had registered themselves as self-employed persons or had founded a company (and took on employees). Most of the craftsmen in the last group said that they provided their services across the entire Estonia, some added that they had also worked or sold their products abroad. Eight craftsmen said they provided their services only within the circle of relatives and acquaintances. The majority of the interviewees, however, were ready to practise in the entire Viljandi County.

All of the interviewed craftsmen were interested in passing on their skills in one form or another. In most cases, the craftsmen were willing to teach one or two apprentices and as a rule, pointed out the need for agreeing on all relevant terms and conditions, such as the apprentice’s wages and deductions for the cost of materials. The majority regarded the apprentice’s motivation as the most important precondition, preferring either students specialising in their craft or other persons seriously interested in acquiring the skills involved. Ten craftsmen were willing to provide craftwork demonstrations in the form of workshops organised for local people. This appears to indicate a desire to increase their social capital and to network in the community.

More than half of the respondents expressed their desire to acquire additional skills. Proportionally, the greatest interest was shown for crafts related to cobblestone or boulder construction – four craftsmen considered it as an important asset and were interested in further training in that area. Log building skills came second – three craftsmen were interested in these. One third of the respondents, which is a surprisingly high percentage, were in principle willing to participate in paid courses. Almost all of the respondents showed an interest in networking with other craftsmen to improve their skills and keep abreast of latest developments in their trade.
In Estonian society, the interest in continuing education seems to be relatively high. According to a recent study, no less than 13% men possessing only a primary education and having a very low income, responded that in principle they have the resources required to continue their education. Among those possessing only a primary education, but having a high income, 62% of the respondents gave the same answer. In the list of activities deemed likely to significantly improve one’s quality of life, these three groups ranked continued education respectively as 10th, 6th and 11th. A curious exception was noted in the case of men possessing a higher education and having a very low income, whose desire to continue their studies only occupied 16th to 18th place in their priority list (Kalmus, Keller 2004: 208–209).
Practical fieldwork experience

A good interviewer, in addition to having a thorough knowledge of his or her the subject, should have an open personality, and be capable of negotiating and achieving compromises. He or she should also be a flexible planner, ready to work hard on the data gathered. In sum, this means having excellent social skills. In view of this, there are bound to arise doubts regarding the ability of undergraduate students, who have not done anything like this before, to cope as field interviewers.

Still, in addition to research fellows of the Department of Native Estonian Crafts, six third year students of native Estonian construction from UT Viljandi Culture Academy participated in the project’s fieldwork as interviewers. The students did this as classwork for their basic course in practical heritage collection. Since the geographical area covered was relatively large, the independence and mobility of the interviewers was crucial to their task. The students chose their work sectors themselves and used their personal cars to cover these. The choice of craftsmen to be interviewed on the basis of the preliminary tip forms was also left to the students themselves.

Before starting with fieldwork, our team’s researchers held a training session with the students. The students were explained the background of the project and provided extensive instructions on the techniques and methods to be used. If an interviewer still felt unsure of himself or herself, the supervisor assisted him or her in conducting the first interview in the field.

Although for the most part the interviewers followed their instructions faithfully, some students failed to observe certain technical recommendations, apparently considering them unimportant. Thus, a group of three students decided to forgo making an appointment with their intended interviewees and drove out to their residence, taking it for
granted that the craftsmen to be interviewed would be home. Predictably, this resulted in a waste of time and petrol. In fact, in many cases it took considerable time to actually locate the craftsmen even when an appointment had been made – it is not easy to find someone living a rural community simply by their address.

The experience showed us that in order to achieve more uniform results, we should raise the proportion of professional interviewers on the fieldwork team. For instance, sociology or ethnology students, who are likely to have more fieldwork experience, would probably be a good choice. They should work in pairs consisting of one student who knows the craft or trade involved, and another who is experienced in fieldwork methods.

The fieldwork we carried out should be regarded as a pilot study. It provided a substantial body of information on attitudes prevailing in the field. Yet, it also highlighted certain potential problems in the design of the study. Thus, in view of the fact that working with a long survey form for an extended period of time may prove too strenuous a task for a beginner interviewer, future surveys should probably have a more specific focus and deal with a limited set of issues. In addition, fieldwork should be implemented so that interviewers and supervisors remain at all times in reasonably close proximity. This will allow supervisors to provide timely advice to the interviewers. Furthermore, the number of preparatory training sessions should be increased so as to be able dedicate more time to mastering the techniques required for efficient interviewing, and getting a firm grasp on the use of technical equipment (digital cameras, voice recording equipment, etc.).
4. 2008 Database of Viljandi County Craftspeople Possessing Inherited Skills

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In early 2003, researchers of the Department of Journalism and Communication of the University of Tartu conducted an extensive survey entitled “Mina. Maailm. Meedia” (Myself, the World and the Media) to study cultural activities that people in Estonia engage in. The survey showed that, statistically, men’s involvement in craft activities is remarkably widespread in Estonia. Thus, 2% of respondents considered themselves actively involved in artisanal activities, and 4% with fine woodcutting activities. Respectively, 14% and 37% of male respondents said they had tried their hand in those fields at some point (Kalmus, Keller 2004: 101). Since the relevant survey items did not specifically define the scope of either activity, the respondents disposed of a considerable latitude to interpret the meaning of their involvement for the purposes of the survey. Still, the figures unequivocally show that the fields in question currently enjoy considerable popularity in Estonia.

From April to August 2008, students of the speciality of native Estonian construction (taught at Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu), together with their supervisors, conducted a series of interviews with craftsmen active in various building and woodworking trades. This chapter deals with the empirical aspects of these interviews.
It provides examples or the rare crafts and skills discovered, describes the principal findings, discusses the hypotheses that were confirmed (and those that were refuted), and summarises the end results of the entire project.

Finds of rare crafts and craftsmen

During fieldwork, we were lucky to be referred to a number of craftsmen engaged in rare trades and having highly individual styles. To the extent possible in the framework of a survey focusing on the day-to-day activities of contemporary craftsmen, we considered their skills to merit being reflected in a detailed record.

The craftsmen interviewed were engaged in the following trades (name of trade and number of interviewees active in that trade):

- potters – 4; log builders (new buildings) – 2; producers of wood roofing – 3; builders of timber frame structures – 1; wood roofers – 1; rolled metal roofers – 1; door and window restorers – 1; cabinet-makers and other joiners (makers of doors, windows, stairs, etc.) – 5; stonecutters – 1; rehabilitators of water mills, small-scale hydro producers – 2; furriers and saddlers – 1; builders of cobblestone structures, boulder splitters – 4; builders of clay structures – 1; restorers of manors and manor ensembles – 1; builders of dug wells – 1; blacksmiths – 1; basket weavers – 1 (DCPIS¹ 2008).

Our first rare find relates to the trade of building dug wells lined in traditional style with cobblestones. The trade used to be very popular in the northern part of Viljandi County. It may be hard for contemporary users of concrete liner cylinders to fathom the difficulty involved in periodically changing the logs used as well lining. Yet, the construction of well linings from cobblestones in dry masonry was still more complicated

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¹ Database of Viljandi County Craftsmen Possessing Inherited Skills – transl.
and required very specific skills. When one looks into a well lined using this technology, the picture that opens to the eye is similar to looking into a huge pipe made of cobblestones. It is an impressive – and an unreal – sight that is likely to perplex any observer (Fig. 5). Several wells lined in this technology have been preserved to date, in spite of the fact that, according to the locals, they appear to have been built at least a hundred years ago.

It should be noted by way of a background remark that precious few descriptions of dug well lining technologies have been preserved. A medieval stone-lined village well was investigated as part of the excavations conducted by the archaeologist Vladimir Sokolovsky at a site near Olustvere (Central Estonia). The results of these excavations have not been published yet. The situation is different with respect to a similar well excavated near Lehmja in North Estonia. Unfortunately, in that case it seems that the technology used to line the well was not the centre of attention for the excavating researchers (explanation provided orally by the archaeologist Andres Tvauri, 2008).
Thus the information at our disposal prior to starting the fieldwork suggested that basic know-how of the technology of building cobblestone lined dug wells was extinct. Yet, to our surprise, in the course of fieldwork we discovered that Sulev Saarpuu, a woodworker living in Moori village of the municipality of Saarepeedi, was able to outline the principal part of the technology to one of our interviewers. He explained that in lining the well, the builders selected stones of conical shapes, and laid them so as to allow the next layer to wedge into the previous one, thus creating a series of ‘arches’ that absorbed the pressure of the soil (Saarpuu, DCPIS 2008).

The second important crafts find that was discovered in the course of fieldwork concerned the trade of straw thatching. In Viljandi County, that trade had been considered extinct. Yet, we found that Valeri Velbaum, a farmer living near Olustvere (Central Estonia), accepts special orders for thatching-grade straw. The trade of straw thatching in Estonia was dealt a serious blow after World War II, when harvesting combines (that effectively shredded the straw) were introduced on a wide scale. (As a matter of fact, there were relatively few straw roofs to be seen in Estonian villages by that time.) Thus, Velbaum makes use of a vintage harvester, one that leaves the straw stalks intact and allows them to be used for roofing. It takes about a year to fill an order for thatching straw, and the price of the straw is nearly equivalent to the price of wood shakes. According to Velbaum, the installation of a straw roof can be safely entrusted to reed roofers, because the technology is largely the same (Velbaum, DCPIS 2008).

Craftsmen builders: economic situation and prospects

The most important and definitive experience resulting from our fieldwork is perhaps the fact that none of the craftsmen we interviewed showed a pessimistic outlook on the viability of their craft or trade in the future. Even those who had ceased to be actively involved in the trade for reasons of age or health, said that demand for ‘old school’ building and woodworking know-how was on the rise.
Due to current economic situation\(^2\), positive views were expressed by a number of interviewees in relation to the prospects of traditional male crafts, and especially traditional building trades.

*When a society becomes wealthier, its members have time for fields of life other than those that they work in. By that I also mean the preservation of cultural heritage. /---/ Many have started collecting vintage objects, and are restoring these to their beauty. It’s a very promising field (translated from the interview with Mart Vaiksaar, DCPIS 2008).*

\(^2\) When the fieldwork of the project was carried out, the 2008 economic downturn was not felt in Estonia yet. Still, some of the interviewees mentioned that the situation was likely to change. They also pointed out that the change could bring new opportunities – in a tighter economy, it would be easier to hire employees, and those hired would probably be more motivated (Mart Vaiksaar, DCPIS 2008).
The impact of age and health factors on craftsmen’s assessment of the value of their skills was much less marked than we had anticipated. Thus, a majority of retired craftsmen expressed their full support to the survey project and wholeheartedly embraced its aims. Still, they remained very modest regarding their own skills and roles as craftsmen. None of the interviewees mentioned any serious livelihood problems. Most of them intimated that if a craftsman is able to do quality work and to observe agreed deadlines, he will easily be able to make more than the average income. The biggest problems that were mentioned related to hired labour. There were no complaints as to shortage of orders, or about any external factors that would directly interfere with the practice of the trade.

Right now, employers are all up against it, but then there are times when it’s the other way round, and the pressure is on the worker. Humans are really animals by nature, you know. You can be paid all the money in the world and yet not have enough. And then people are lazy, too. Without some prodding from behind, they will slacken up if the money’s there anyway. In any case, the problem’s in the quality of labour (translated from the interview with Mart Vaiksaar, DCPIS 2008).

How do craftsmen price their work and what are the general standards in this respect? As a rule, these matters are not discussed publicly – unless the craftsman operates as a registered business and is ready to provide price quotes to potential customers, followed by drawing up a formal agreement and only then starting the work. Changes in the economic situation are changing the ambience in male crafts as well. Understandably, it will be hard for someone who has for most of his professional life held a steady job as an employee, to start providing costs estimates and price quotes, drawing up formal agreements, and doing ‘customer relations’. Problems in adjusting to the need to observe fixed terms and deadlines, or eventual setbacks in the construction work undertaken, may cause a skilled craftsman to stop operating as an independent business. Yet, it appears that most of the
craftsmen practising today in Viljandi County have made the adjustment, and have developed their own contracting standards. The same appears to hold in comparisons between different crafts and trades.

The rise in popularity of contractual relations has to a certain extent been conditioned by specific characteristics of the piecework arrangements that predominate in contemporary practice. An instance of this would be a relationship that arises when a property owner hires a service provider from outside the community by means of a newspaper advertisement. Conversely, craftsmen who have an established reputation in the community often tend to neglect concluding a specific agreement regarding the terms of proding their service, and perform piecework in accordance with good construction practice and a quality standard that they have developed on the basis of personal experience. Still, in the case of extended or more complicated projects, hourly rates are sometimes used to calculate the fee, provided a trusting work relationship has developed between the owner and the service provider. (DCPIS, 2008).

Craftsmen entrepreneurs who mostly serve the market of private individuals, often face the problem of owner ignorance. All interviewees agreed that in filling orders from private individuals, a significant amount of time may be lost to persuading the owner that one or another operation is necessary to achieve a quality result – in other words, the service provider is forced to educate the owner.

*I’ve explained this to him many times. Look here, my dear man, I’ve said – there’s really nothing I can do about this... A stretch of the foundation has subsided here, and there I can see cracks in that [cobblestone wall]. If they want to put a tile roof on top of this, the whole thing will collapse, there’s really nothing doing about that. Think of it – all of a sudden, you drop tens of thousands of pounds of weight on the structure. When a wall has been fully exposed for a long time, there is not much one can do about it. (translated from the interview with Urmas Anton, DCPIS 2008).
Material and supplies

The material and supplies required for practising an inherited or traditional trade are normally relatively easy to find, and their prices tend to be very reasonable – with certain exceptions. Thus, in the immediate vicinity of the city of Viljandi, the price of basic masonry or paving-grade cobblestone has shot up steeply.

*Interviewee: Cobblestone’s now in short supply. The owners have really started asking money for it. And I’ve bought some. For the price of a thousand kroons [approximately 65 euros – transl.] per tonne. They’re only too happy to haul ten tonnes into your back yard – and then to hold out their hand for ten grand. And people pay that money, too. Well – where else will you get it from?*
Interviewer: Indeed, there was talk some time ago, that Swedes buy cobblestone for three kroons per kilo.

Interviewee: True – and when I started to pave the yard down here, I went to look for cobblestone – only I didn’t find any! Gone – to the very last piece. I had to go to Bombre quarry for the right stones. I’m telling you: it’s all gone and now you’ve got to pay through the nose to get any (translated from the interview with Urmas Anton, DCPIS 2008).

Many craftsmen active in the restoration of buildings, in log wall patching and in window and door repairs, expressed an interest in creating a network to facilitate finding reusable material.
It depends on what you do of course – but if you need vintage wood, you should be able to get it in Estonia. Personal relationships count a lot in these matters. I’ve been able to get a number of vintage log pieces from Urmas Tuuleveski. He’s got this old smithy in Öisu, that he uses as a store of vintage logs. To get these, you really have to move around, ready to rush up at the first whiff of someone giving any away. We should improve the spread of information in these matters, because collecting vintage building logs is a creative thing. It’s not like you can go to a supplies store such as a Decora or Bauhof and pick what you want off the shelf (translated from the interview with Mart Vaiksaar, DCPIS 2008).

Serious raw material problems have only been reported by wood shake producers, who need completely knot-free and straight-grained roundwood to split quality shakes. A few of the producers have effectively reduced their production of shakes, and have switched to shingles. Since these are cut out of log sections using a power saw, lower-quality wood can be used (DCPIS 2008).

Craftsmen’s networks

Among other things, the fieldwork part of the project was intended to shed light on craftsmen’s networks. The questions that we sought to answer were the following: Do craftsmen know one another? Do they exchange information? Do they cooperate professionally?

The data showed that the owners of water mills had made a considerable effort to develop cooperation arrangements. Most water mill owners are interested in small-scale power generation. They actively exchange information, and seek the benefits of cooperation also when ordering new equipment and carrying out construction projects. It may
easily be that this is a reaction against pressure from nature conservation agencies that effectively oppose the restoration of water mills located on small rivers (see Raudvere 2007). The cooperation of mill-owners is spared the complications of competition – according to relevant Estonian statutes, any excess power generated by former water mills must be purchased by the national power company Eesti Energia (Kalev Pehme, Villu Halliksoo, DCPIS 2008).

As for the other crafts and building-related trades, the picture with respect to communication and cooperation was almost invariably the same. Individuals engaged in traditionally male crafts tended to forgo advertising their products or services, shunned public attention and avoided cooperation. The situation is vividly described by the following excerpt from the interview with the potter Ralf Linnupuu:

*Interviewer:* That’s it then – we get a phone call from somebody who’s looking for such-and-such a tradesman – would we know if there are any in the region? Well – if someone asks, are we allowed to tell them that there’s this man here in Abja village that can make this type of thing? Or would it be better if we declined to make that kind of advertisement?

*Interviewee:* People will find me, you know. [---] In Viljandi, those pasta bosses and ... they’ve all been to see me. They simply, you know, ask around and call, well... I don’t want no advertisements or nothing. ’Cause, y’know, if you’re the man, they will come to you. [---] He who that starts advertising himself, just isn’t... (that’s) just not right, y’know. Like Savisaar [a well-known Estonian politician – transl.] and his “Elect me” campaign (translated from the interview with Ralf Linnupuu, DCPIS 2008).
Partly, such attitudes can be explained by the unprecedented boom in Estonian construction industry, the high point of which fell on the period immediately preceding the fieldwork. During the boom, demand for specialist craftsmen shot up exponentially and there were not enough skilled specialists to go around.

What good is that advertising to me anyway? Most of my orders come from people I know, and from people who know those people. The fact is, I don’t even want to take faraway jobs, or jobs with complete strangers. But that could all change in the next couple of years, and then advertisements might come in handy indeed (translated from the interview with Artur Kasepuu, DCPIS 2008).

In hindsight, we might have obtained better results in our survey if we had considered the fact that craftsmen enjoying an excellent professional reputation in the community can be booked for considerable periods in advance. In the case of highly sought-after potters, for instance,
several years long waiting lists have become the rule. People who want a quality product or service seem to take such waiting periods as a matter of fact, and do not complain. On the one hand, these waiting lists testify to the scarcity of skilled craftsmen. On the other hand, they suggest that the product or service is priced relatively modestly. In any case, such customer relationship practices represent an interesting phenomenon that deserves closer examination. For instance, they beg the question of whether younger or less popular craftsmen may sometimes exaggerate, claiming to have waiting lists far beyond what is actually there.

![Image of a water wheel and generator]

Fig. 10. The power generator designed and built by the water mill owner Kalev Pehme is driven by a huge water wheel acting over a long cardan drive shaft and a two-step reductor system. The generator has been shut down for a change of wheel bearings. Linnaveski farm in Sooviku village in the municipality of Tarvastu. Photo by Madis Rennu (2008).
It should be noted that the matter of communication networks, and the craftsmen’s ability to cooperate, represent very topical issues and should have merited much closer analysis. Although the survey form touched on the subject in passing (cf. the survey items regarding craftsmen’s interest in learning or teaching the craft, the possibility of using local help in manufacturing their product or providing their service, the problems that craftsmen sees in practice), the data showed that interviewees did not have much to say on the subject of communication networks. Is cooperation so rare because of a certain professional complacency, or because of an aversity to competition? Or is it a broader function of individualist attitudes that seem to be so characteristic of Estonians after the re-establishment of the country’s independence in 1992?

Yet, the sparsity and relative lack of dynamism of communication networks in traditional building trades is in sharp contrast with the burgeoning of certain crafts often pursued as a hobby. In these, cooperation appears to be thriving. For instance, we could cite the example of dugout\textsuperscript{3} carving, or refer to the rapid rise in popularity of certain previously forgotten technologies, and certain novel ones – such as clay and straw construction, or the practice of sustainable rehabilitation of vintage buildings.\textsuperscript{4} These are currently in fashion among young urban intellectuals. This specific group is also very keen on making use of the opportunities provided by the Internet. Improved access to the theory of the crafts involved by means of the Internet is naturally no guarantee

\textsuperscript{3} See, for instance the blog site of dugout carvers at: http://haabjas.blogspot.com/ (Last viewed 18 September 2008), the announcement regarding the founding of the Eesti Haabjaselts [Dugout Society of Estonia] at http://soomaa-com.blogspot.com/2008/07/asutati-eesti-haabjaselts.html (Last viewed 18 September 2008), etc.

\textsuperscript{4} The Information Centre for Sustainable Renovation (http://www.srik.ee/) also has a branch office in Viljandi, at which training events are organised on a regular basis (http://www.srik.ee/index.php?region=3&amenu=0). Last viewed 7 December 2008.
of an immediate improvement in the practical skills required to practise them, but it does help attract more people to the crafts, and thereby raises awareness of those crafts, also building a reputation for their practitioners.

**Training needs and teachers**

One of the central aims of the project’s fieldwork component was to locate master craftsmen who would be able to teach their trade. We also intended to perform a provisional needs assessment with respect to the trades and the type of courses that would be demanded by people possessing inherited skills and interested in improving these. This section will examine the results of the needs assessment aspect of the project, and analyse to what extent our hypotheses were confirmed, and in what respect they were refuted.

The survey responses clearly suggest that craftspeople consider teaching and practical training of apprentices a tedious task that pays considerably below that which the craftsman could earn by practising his craft – at least this was their position with regard to beginner apprentices.

*Last year we had those characters, those second and third year students from Vana-Võidu* [vocational secondary school offering a builder’s curriculum – author’s note] – *can’t even hit a nail on the head properly, would you believe it!* (translated from the interview with Artur Kasepuu, DCPIS 2008).

This attitude was broadly shared across all crafts. Nevertheless, on average, 75% of respondents considered it necessary to pass on their skills. The remainder tended to think that the skills in question are out of place in today’s world, and expressed doubts as to whether anyone would be interested in learning what they could teach. Thus, the picture with
respect to craftspeople’s readiness to share their skills was much more open and positive than we had expected.

It was only natural that those active in tourism-related trades were keen to pass on the crafts practised in the community – for them, any kind of narrative that bolsters the local spirit of place, is of vital importance. A success story that can be cited in this respect is the joint project undertaken by local tourism businesses in cooperation with the Soomaa National Park (South East Estonia). The partners have succeeded in attracting a steady flow of visitors interested in the trademark local craft of dugout carving. They have regularly organised hands-on training events in dugout carving open to the public. The project has also been recognised by the local county administration – a hint to boat-carving can be discerned, for instance, in the brand slogan used by Viljandi County for promotional purposes: Ürgses rütmis (In primeval rhythm\(^5\)).

New technologies and industrial work methods have significantly impacted the very foundations of the world of male crafts, which was until recently predominantly defined by master-apprentice relationships. Will those relationships remain viable in spite of these developments? Although not formally evident in many cases, and occurring in a variety of different formats, apprenticeship years spent under the hand of an older master form a recognisable part in the professional career of all widely reputed masters. The youngest craftsmen interviewed are no exception to this rule. Hence, the formation of master-apprentice relationships still appears to be possible.

Many of master craftsmen actively practising their trades deplored the lack of skilled help. The question, ‘To what extent have you been able to use local labour in manufacturing your product or providing your service?’, produced some truly dejected answers. In fact, most interviewees replied that the very thought was ludicrous and that

\(^5\) Unofficial translation prepared for the purposes of this edition – transl.
they had not even considered it as an option. Thus, it would seem that practising craftsmen face considerable difficulties in finding motivated apprentices. On the other hand, a person wishing to become one would probably find it relatively easy to secure an apprenticeship in the craft he or she is interested in.

In other words – instead of a lack of crafts, we now have a shortage of craftspeople. Why are craftspeople’s ranks thinning? Is it a matter of the low status of crafts, or one of insufficient pay, or of a problem with working conditions?

*Question:* Why has this gone the way it has—I mean, that you can’t get a job done any more?

*Answer:* Look – you’re young, so you should understand. This crafts business has really slowed down, it is no longer popular among youths. It is because of this that I am putting so much
Madis Rennu

dedication into what I do. Because there is hardly anybody who would want to do woodworking, or masonry – now, they all want to be in IT, or a sales agent or something. [...] The generation that was in their twenties in the 1990s – I mean, they were constantly going to places like Germany and brought back used cars, or bought and sold other things. But they don’t produce anything, do they? Of course, they’ve made it, and they’re leading good lives, but come to think of it – all that buying and selling does not make the country one bit better (translated from the interview with Urmas Anton, DCPIS 2008).

By way of conclusion: should we speak of crafts or of men’s work?

If we were asked about the most unexpected realisation that our fieldwork yielded, we would have to reply: the lack of a reasonably clear concept of the crafts⁶ in contemporary Estonian. According to a relatively widespread interpretation, the notion of crafts is linked to women’s handicrafts. A popular understanding of men’s crafts links these, for instance, to the making of wood toys, to basket weaving, and partly also to blacksmithing. Yet why do so many other types of skilled service that cannot be performed industrially, tend to be excluded from the notion? Why, for instance, is the work of a mason, a potter, or a roofer described in common parlance as simply ‘men’s work’ and not a ‘craft’?

The authors of the present study did not originally intend to take up the issue of differences between crafts traditionally considered male or female. Yet, in elaborating our fieldwork plans and reflecting on the work performed, we often found ourselves discussing a number of

⁶ In Estonian, käsitöö – literally ‘hand-work’ – transl.
interesting peculiarities of men’s and women’s craft traditions that in all appearance trace their roots to an archaic period. Ave Matsin, leader of the programme of native Estonian textiles at Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu pointed out that, in the practice of women’s crafts to date, as a rule, total costs are not calculated in regard of the craftwork performed. Thus, for instance, a craftswoman making mittens would not make a tally of all hours (including those indirectly related to production) spent on making a pair. Nor would she take into account various incidental costs (hay-making, sheep fodder, repairs to the roof of the cattle-barn, etc.). In the structure of rewards for craftwork, women attribute a higher importance to social status and recognition (family, craft clubs, other community events) than they do to monetary compensation (see also Teppor 2008). A part of the reward takes the form of a ritual confirmation of ‘high social status’. This appears to be common to both the traditional practice of the crafts and their modern one (training events, craft clubs, social events in community associations)\(^7\). Ave Matsin also pointed out that by providing an explanation, to regular students and the participants of various crafts courses, of the details of costs involved in the process of craftwork, the programme’s teachers are in a certain sense undermining the hitherto culture of women’s crafts.

Hence, there appear to be obvious differences in the pricing practices and livelihood strategies of male and female craftpersons. In traditionally male crafts, the emotional and social components of rewards are intimately linked to money. Presumably, men’s more adequate pricing skills partly result from the fact that their craftwork tends to require more obvious, and bulkier, inputs (petrol, various equipment and machinery, special workshop facilities, considerable amounts of raw materials).

The ethnologist Kirsti Jõesalu has suggested that, to a considerable

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\(^7\) There are probably very few Estonians who have not heard popular sayings such as “A good woman does not sit around”, “Men sleep, women laze”, etc. (free translations – transl.).
extent, the origins of the social roles of women’s contemporary crafts lie in various **niche activities**, which during the Soviet period were practised in hobby groups whose purpose was to provide recreational leisure opportunities (various officially authorised clubs, associations and studios). For most of the people who participated in these, their respective niche activities tended to be more important than their day job, they identified with them more, and considered them to have higher priority (Jõesalu 2004: 160).

We should not forget, either, that the functions of crafts in our society have changed. Thus, under Soviet rule, a considerable part of crafts practice can be explained by the need to compensate for services or products that were scarce. Now the situation has changed, and good craft skills are likely to attract social capital, an appreciation for which appears to be developing also in men’s crafts. Craftsmen have started to organise their own counterparts to women’s craft community events. In fact, a number of these, such as blacksmiths’ festivals, Hanseatic festivals and traditional dugout carving courses, have already acquired the status of staple event in the life of the communities in which they are held.

What should be changed in the work of our cultural institutions so as to improve the prospects of men’s crafts and those practising them? First of all, more attention should be devoted to increasing public recognition of the craft or trade involved. Raising the profile of the craft in the media would be a start. Growing public appreciation of the skills involved will then facilitate the building of wider networks. Special attention should also be paid to the work of male craftsmen in the outlying municipalities of Viljandi County, in which the majority of small enterpreneurs are craftsmen, and small enterprises tend to be the predominant – or even sole – employers in the private sector.
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Joosep Metslang

With the passage of time, buildings as pieces of craftsmanship have a tendency to become anonymous. Many public as well as private buildings were created by accomplished craftsmen, of whom we are now only reminded by the buildings they have left us. We are usually able to trace major structures to the architect who designed them and, for medieval and modern historical periods, we can often link them to the names of their owners. At the same time, the identity of the builder tends to remain obscure and is eventually lost.

Yet, craftsman builders do have ways of imprinting their mark on their products. It is almost customary for the builder to leave a more or less obvious mark on the structure that he created. Such marks may take the form of a name, a date or the time of completion scratched onto a hidden structural component or surface in the building. They may also appear as a vodka bottle laid in the masonry and, by way of exception, even as an ostentatious signature visible from a distance (see Fig. 12).

The chapter at hand attempts to provide an inside, bottom-up view of the history of building in Estonia and in Viljandi County in the 20th century, and to do this from the perspective of the builders themselves. For that, the author has used interviews with former builders, and with those who are still actively engaged in the trade. Unfortunately, oral
tradition is only good for information concerning at most the last five decades. To go back further than that, one must use written sources, or have recourse to the above-mentioned marks left by the builders on their work.

An additional purpose of this chapter is to sketch a framework for detailed studies to be conducted in the future, and perhaps to provide directions for those studies. There are considerable gaps in our knowledge of the building trade, and its regulatory framework, during the period of the Russian empire and the initial period of Estonian independence. The same applies to the practice and technologies of building in Soviet enterprises and collective farms, to the work of Soviet building brigades, to private building practices, and to building practices that characterise the period following reassertion of Estonia’s independence. A topic that requires a separate analysis, and that interests the authors of this monograph the most, is the linking of traditional building practices to current ones. It fascinates us to know what steps have been taken in this regard, what successes have been achieved, what trends and
prospects are there. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on the evolution of the practice of log building in Estonia, and on Estonian craftsmen’s corresponding building, makeover and refurbishment skills.

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The heyday of Estonian log building falls on the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. During that period, a growing population, together with advancing industrialisation and urbanisation, made for an unprecedented building boom. Still, most of the builders remained true to traditional wood building technologies. However, already by the year 1918, when Estonia proclaimed its independence, it was evident that the consumption of forests had to be reduced, and alternatives to wood as construction material started to be considered (see, for instance, Fig. 13).

During the Soviet period, new requirements of mass production and scale effectively stymied the development of log building. The log building industry that has been revived today cannot be compared to that

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Fig. 13. The former threshing barn of Kivistiku farm in Ivaski village of the municipality of Suure-Jaani. The dimensions of 19th century log buildings are rather different from what has become standard today, and can be accomplished with ease. Photo by J. Metslang (2008).
Fig. 14. The residential building of Suitsu farm in Viiratsi village of the municipality of Tõnuküla (photo taken around 1910). In the beginning of the 20th century, log builders gradually started to emulate urban architecture. They used trimmed logs, corners without overhang, big windows, tall sided walls. Photo from the private collection of T. Suits.

Fig. 15. The same building nowadays (refurbished in 1984): the walls are sided with silicate bricks (a material broadly available in the 1980s), the window openings have been enlarged, new windows have been installed. Subsequently, the building has also received a brand-new rolled metal roof. Photo J. Metslang (2008).
of the end of the 19th century either in its total volume, or the size or the number of individual units built.

In comparison to the log building practices of earlier periods, those of the end of the 19th century testified to the spread of an important innovation: the technique of straight corners (no log overhang) (Fig. 14–15). This appears to be in part a measure designed to economise material, and in part an architectural fashion – straight corners are easier to weatherboard and they resemble stone architecture more (Kaila 2001: 410–414).

In the 1930s, A. Klein summed up the advantages of log or timber-frame homes as follows: “Previously, wood was preferred over stone because it was cheaper [...] it tended to reduce humidity in the home, and wooden houses often had healthier air” (translated from Klein 1931: 17). Developments in the construction materials industry, and a shortage of wood, soon changed this position. For instance, already in 1906, a committee convened by the Railroad Board of Finland to study the matter concluded that, when all costs were taken into account, brick structures were cheaper to build than wooden ones (Jokelainen 2005: 61).
During the initial period of Estonia’s independence (1918–1940) log construction (Fig. 16) was partly supplanted by somewhat more economical timber frame construction (Fig. 17). Among other things, the latter’s advantage consists in the fact that green timbers can be used, and the walls may be weatherboarded or plastered directly upon completion, because there is practically no risk of settling (Bölau 1938: 42–43).

Estonia’s log building traditions survived the introduction of Soviet rule, although after the 1960s they lost much of their former importance. After World War II, everything from food to construction materials was in short supply. Man-made construction materials were the scarcest. The classical DIY manuals written during that period by A. Veski unintentionally convey an idea of the situation in the construction materials market of the time. For instance, Veski writes: “The main type of wood exterior wall for a small home is an insulation-filled timber frame structure. In the discussion below, we will only touch upon horizontal-

Fig. 18. Residence halls of the workers of Viljandi Sawmill in Tõnissaare village of the municipality of Suure-Jaani. The halls were completed as early as in the 1950s by the sawmill’s own team of builders. Plaster was used as exterior finish. Photo by J. Metslang (2008).
course log wall construction ... because in some cases a home builder will find it easier to obtain roundwood than milled timbers” (translated from Veski 1959: 164; see also Veski 1969: 128). The scarcity of the post-war period accounts for much of the popularity of reuse in general and the reuse of salvaged logs in particular.

As far as design was concerned, post-war log construction tended to follow in the footsteps of the traditions of the 1920s and 1930s. Builders used trimmed logs and built straight corners, cutting large window and door openings in the walls (see Fig. 20). As for other technologies used in home construction, timber frame was the most important. According to R. Johanson, construction manager of the former Kalju collective farm, interior as well as exterior walls were built in accordance with the instructions set out in A. Veski’s manuals. They consisted of a timber frame that was sided inside and outside with boards. The cavity between the sidings was filled by loose flax bast, and reed mats were affixed to exterior siding as a base for plaster (Johanson, DCPIS 2008).

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1 Here and below, DCPIS stands for the Database of craftsmen possessing inherited skills. When the reference is linked to a particular interviewee, the surname of that interviewee is given at the beginning of the reference. The year in which the data were recorded is shown at the end of the reference (e.g., Tamm, DCPIS 2008).
This period of standstill in the history of log construction in Estonia extended into the 1970s, 1980s and even 1990s. It was largely caused by the development and increased availability of man-made construction materials (Fig. 21). At the same time, certain aspects of the Soviet bureaucratic system made wood and timber products very hard to obtain – even in wood-rich rural regions. This, in turn, led to a change in attitudes, as a result of which log building skills were no longer deemed worth to be passed on to the next generation.

Still, the above should by no means be seen to mean that no log construction projects whatsoever were undertaken during the period of 1970–1990. For instance, Aigar Zahkna and his father were sufficiently skilled in the craft of log building in the 1980s to construct several auxiliary buildings on their farm. Yet they did not perform log construction as a commercial service (Zahkna, DCPIS 2008).

During the Soviet period, brick and engineered stone started to be used for log replacement, as well as in log structure makeovers and in the construction of annexes to log structures. This practice

persists to date. Yet, starting in the 1990s, the use of logs or timbers for such repairs or makeovers, or even log patching, has been the rising trend.

An instance of repairs typical to the period of log homes is the residential building (historically, the threshing barn) of the Tamme farm complex in Kobruvere village of the municipality of Suure-Jaani (Fig. 22). In the course of the repairs performed in 1983 by R. Johanson, decayed parts of the log walls were replaced by the typical material of the period – the so-called Narva composite blocks\(^2\), which in spite of being typical, tended to be in short supply. The walls were then insulated with glass wool. The layout of interior walls of the drying room is of particular interest – in order to maximise functional floorspace, lightweight walls were constructed at unconventional angles of 135° (Johanson, DCPIS 2008).

\(^2\) Lightweight concrete and ash composite – transl.

Fig. 21. During the period of Soviet rule, the official preference for large-scale uniform blocks of flats significantly curbed the demand for log building skills. The photo shows E. Saar, a foreman of the former Kalju collective farm. Photo by J. Metslang (2008).
A typical refurbishment stemming from the same period can be seen in the residential building of the Suitsu farm (constructed in 1914) of Tõnuküla village. The exterior walls of the building were lined with rock wool and then sided with calcium silicate bricks (Suits, PA 2008). The refurbishment took place in 1984, when it was easier to obtain a sufficient quantity of silicate bricks than a supply of boards to side the entire building (Fig. 14 and 15).

Since power tools were scarce during the 1970s, traditional hand tools were predominantly used in constructing individual homes up to the 1990s. Even a Druzhba\(^3\) chainsaw (the bulky construction of which made

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\(^3\) Soviet period petrol-powered chainsaw brand – transl.

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Fig. 22. The former threshing barn of the Tamme farm complex in Kobruvere village in the municipality of Suure-Jaani. The building was made over in 1983: blocks of engineered stone were used to replace decayed logs, windows were enlarged, the exterior walls were lined with insulation and sided with calcium silicate brick. An interesting solution was adopted with respect to the interior walls of the drying room, which were installed at the unconventional angle of 135\(^\circ\). This made it possible to use the room as a summer kitchen, an entrance hallway, a storage space and as a big garage. Photo from the private collection of R. Johanson.
it a rather impractical tool for a carpenter) could be notoriously difficult to procure (Köler, PA 2008).

In 1991, the budding spirit of national reawakening led Tiit Masso, another popular author of DIY construction manuals, to launch an appeal to return to time-honoured construction materials and technologies. “In these times of universal shortage, it appears practical to return to using traditional construction materials,” Masso wrote about the situation in Estonia (1991: 5).

In the period following reassertion of Estonia’s independence, log builders have had to brush up on their craft. An example of renewing demand and relearned craft of log building can be seen in the sauna

![Image of Lubjassaare farm in Ivaski village of the municipality of Suure-Jaan.](image)

**Fig. 23.** Lubjassaare farm in Ivaski village of the municipality of Suure-Jaan. The craft of log building has been revived in Estonia after the country regained independence in 1991, but it will take time to reconcile the use of modern tools with basic principles of log building. The lateral groove of the wall logs in the picture has been made by chainsaw, and has been cut too deep. This will result in an extended settling period that may continue for many years. Photo from the database of Viljandi County craftsmen possessing inherited skills.
and barn buildings of the Lubjassaare farm in Ivaski village, Suure-Jaani municipality. The round notch barn building can be criticised for overly deep lateral grooves, which bear telltale marks of chainsaw use (Fig. 23).

The log building work of Aigar Zahkna of Vaibla village, Kolga-Jaani municipality, has a distinctive style. The craftsman employs a chainsaw to make rough cuts in the round logs used to construct H-notched walls, and finishes the cuts with an axe (Fig. 24). A. Zahkna estimates the cost of a wall built in this technology to be equivalent to that of building the same wall in lightweight expanded clay block.

In conclusion, the traditional craft of log building appears to have been retained its vigour to date. According to a recent study (Markson 2008) there are more than 150 companies active in log building in Estonia.

Fig. 24. Vaibla village in the municipality of Kolga-Jaani. The craftsman A. Zahkna employs a chainsaw to raise a log wall. The faces of each notch must be finished by axe. It is not easy to find a good axe – one may even be worth a trip to Latvia. Photo by J. Metslang (2008).
They help reduce the country’s foreign trade deficit and, especially in the outlying regions, represent an important source of jobs. In the 21st century, log building has become a viable industry, enriched and improved by competition with various other technologies such as stone, concrete and others.

References


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(Toimetamise hetkel lehekülg ettevalmistamisel.)