

A STUDY ON PRODUCTION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Unveiling the potential of the craft sector. The Summary





Img.: Cocoons (2024). © Kuniko Maeda

I The craft ecosystem

The craft ecosystem has opened up and branched out exponentially in recent years, and the limits that define it have needed, and still need, reshaping in order to be capable of dealing with new situations. 20th century contemporary art (also in need of recoding to incorporate new concepts, practices, technologies, and proposals) has definitively influenced many craft practices, as well as their processes, narratives, and business models, depositing parts of its heritage, language, and archetypes in craft in order to freely progress in the face of new challenges. Art galleries have found a way to sustain their business model in collaboration with practices linked to materials, balancing the impossibility of marketing some of the current art formats, and granting craft products a space of added value, with a considerable impact on their economy, as well as advancing the sustainability of many workshops.

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SIMILARLY, DESIGN has found a space of tangibilisation and corporeality in crafts as a refuge from the virtual abyss, promoting the incorporation of procedures and reinterpretation in the craft universe and, above all, a great capacity for modernising forms, uses, and languages. This has resulted in a repositioning in the market and in its business models, as well as in the appearance of new profiles and disciplines and the expansion of the craft universe. The physical and online design store has become a true channel and showcase for the objects and products created by craftspeople.

The global traveller has rediscovered crafts' connection with the land, its performative appeal, and particularly crafts' capacity to represent destinations and make them tangible in the form of objects and pieces.

Surprisingly, travellers visit workshops in remote locales in search of alternative ways of getting their bearings in the world, finding in some craftspeople a

model for an inspiring lifestyle. This territorial permeability has led to new areas of business, specifically in the offering of experiences, workshops, DIY models, public performance, etc. Likewise, direct dialogue with the craftspeople and immersion in the territory boost the value of the piece, improve its perception, add story to its narrative, and, most importantly, reshape the link between user and craftspeople, resulting in an economic improvement for some segments of the sector.

EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE has an enormous dimension and richness. Heritage sites find an indispensable collaborator or ally for their subsistence in architectural crafts as well as in some traditional crafts - a source of work and business that will contribute definitively to the continuance of many crafts, while also supporting the incorporation of new generations. The recent reconstruction of Notre Dame gives a good sense of this. However, the most distinguished monuments, such as grand cathedrals, castles, palaces, etc. are still missing a more fluid dynamic that could offer the sector the capacity that these places, with so much public

transit, have for commercialisation and that would undoubtedly represent a considerable economic benefit for the community at large, not to mention the possibility of the spread and popularisation of some practices.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONS

In a landscape of hybridization such as the present and given the lack of a unique taxonomy for craft practice to create a common framework in different countries, institutions find serious difficulty in classifying and delimiting the spheres of activity and support in this sector that straddles the cultural and the artistic, industry, commerce, and destination - a true administrative puzzle that actually contrasts with institutional interests in spreading crafts' qualities such as sustainability and in supplying public spaces with pieces that promote an emotional connection with their surroundings. This institutional interest should translate into greater provision from public budgets for craft creation and become an important source of activity and funding for the sector.

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THE CULTURE OF COLLABORATION and participation also creates relatively new arenas, opening other disciplines and industries to find in craft products and practises both interests and arguments to incorporate. This results in cooperation opportunities with luxury brands, architectural studies, large visual artist workshops, scenic specialties within the performing arts, and even new requests from the wellbeing sector for practices and experiences with demonstrated health benefits based in the craft practice.

NEW MATERIALS

The exponential emergence of new materials in a discipline defined by its connection to materials and by the knowledge of techniques that allow its mastery and foster its expression entails something very significant, introducing the creator of materials as a promising trade that is very oriented towards collaboration. Innovations in materials have brought surprising and sometimes dazzling forms to crafts, adding value and richness to the craftwork and creating an attractive magnet for buyers and users.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

In turn, new technologies attract unexpected profiles and interests to the sector and set out unknown paths and archetypes for craft practice and business. They add complexity and open the sector to the virtual world, defining a new space in which the coexistence of the tangible and the exclusively visual or intangible is necessary, enabling the eye to see as well as the hands to touch. The online marketplace and digital certification position the craft sector in a landscape of opportunities that has only just begun to be explored.

The craft universe is experiencing one of the most exciting and fascinating moments in recent decades. It is a sector in the midst of furious transformation, as shaken as it is stirred, responding to the challenges and uncertainties that exceed the limits and boundaries shaped over generations. This is undoubtedly a moment ripe with opportunity that will demand the vision to adapt existing models or create new ones in order to progress in a society of diverse sensitivities, a vision which should be inspired in creative environments.



II

Business and production opportunities based in consumer trends and management

The internal dynamics of craft businesses can be improved through new ways of looking at the market and at society as sources of inspiration and prosperity. Identifying business and production opportunities, together with efficient business management, is the key to adding value and making a fair profit. Trend insights can guide the strategies of craftspeople and craft businesses, inspiring new ways of producing, communicating, and marketing their work. Additionally, the study has carried out an in-depth review of business management and support activities that are not being fully leveraged by the craft sector. The opinions of the craft professionals and craftspeople interviewed revealed that, in many cases, the sector is aware of its shortcomings in certain areas. In other cases, the dynamics of the market have not allowed most craft businesses to take advantage of them. Moreover, by identifying and developing untapped markets, craft businesses can unlock new opportunities for revenue generation, customer acquisition, and brand diversification.

The following pages present a series of charts summarising the opportunities identified in the study. Further information on them is available in the main report **Unveiling the Potential of the Craft Sector. A Study on Production and Business Opportunities**.

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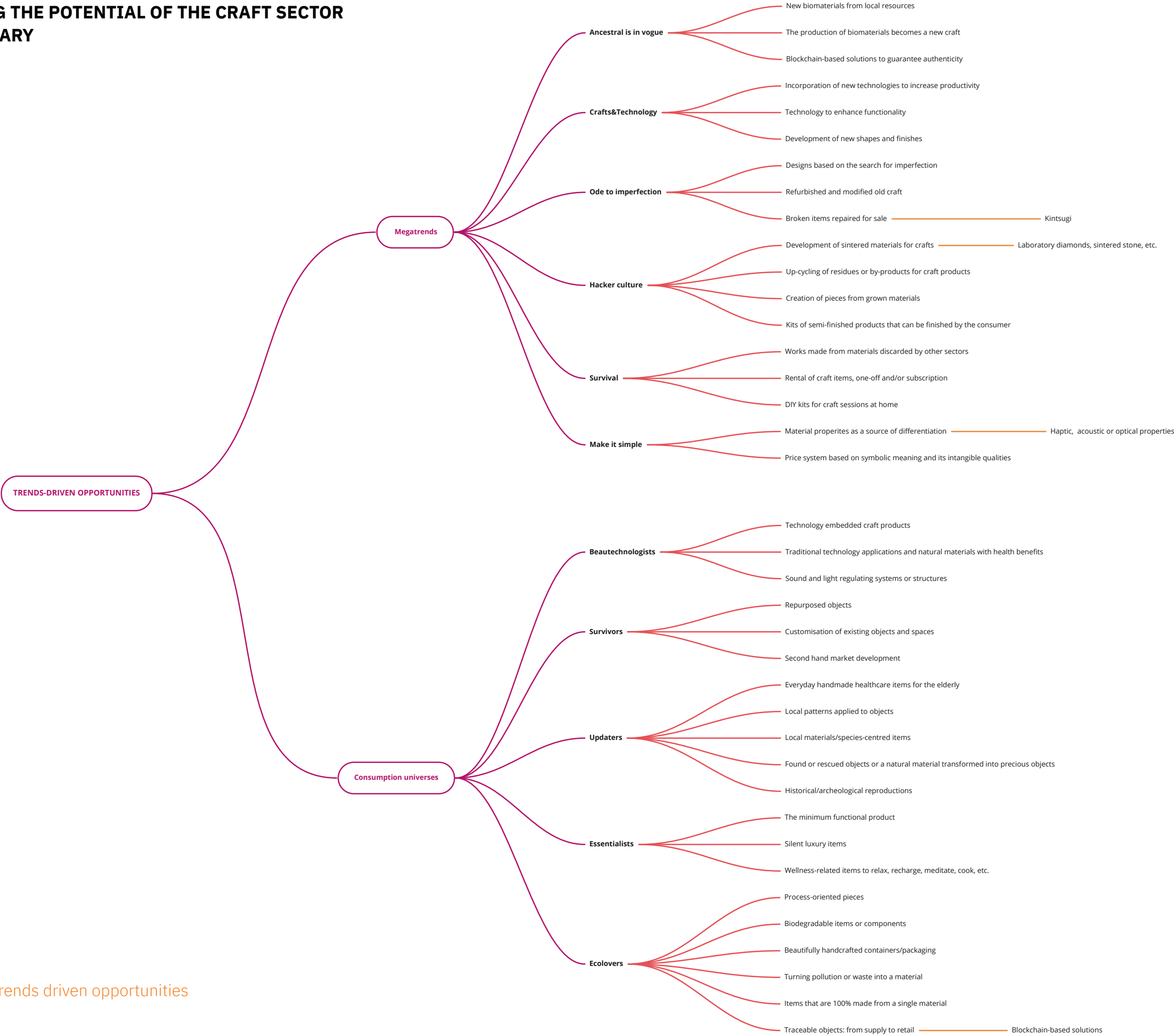


Diagram 1: Trends driven opportunities

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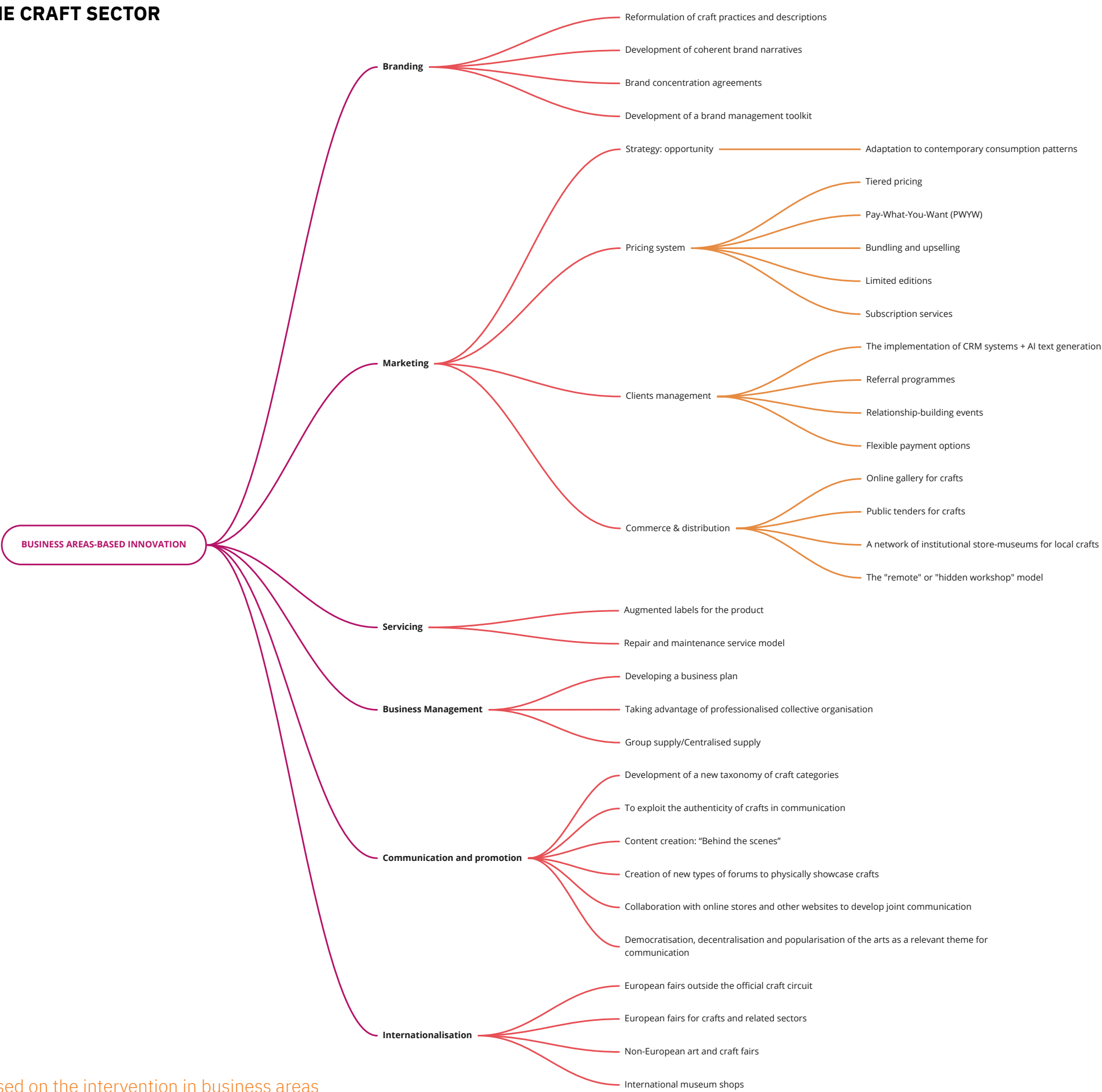


Diagram 2: Innovation opportunities based on the intervention in business areas

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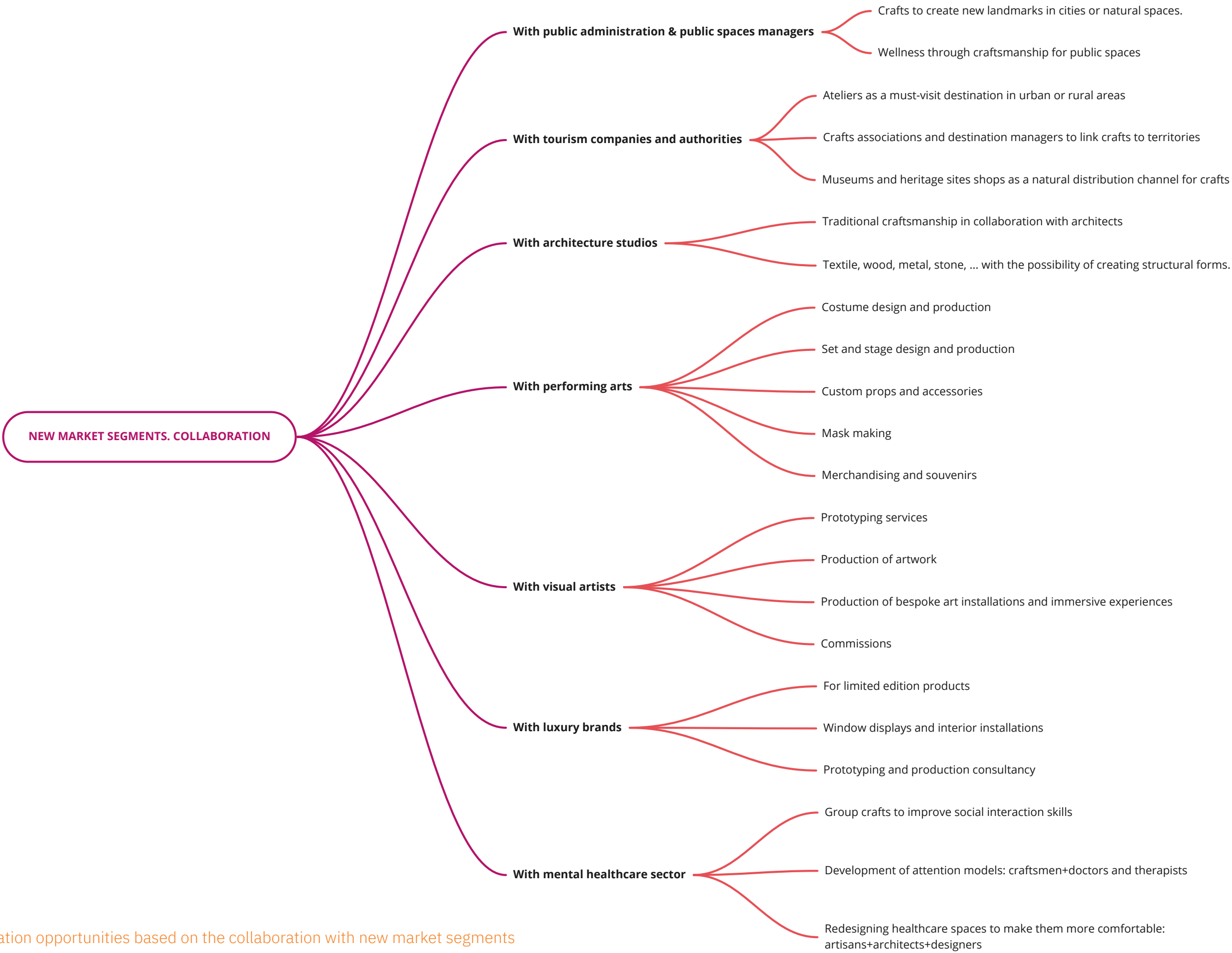


Diagram 3: Innovation opportunities based on the collaboration with new market segments



Img.: Bob Basset. Photo: Leonid Shtaida ©

III

Keeping relevant traditional crafts

Craft is contrasted with popular development dogmas such as innovation, planning and the knowledge economy. While emphasising tradition, craft can be forward-looking, experimental, adaptive and a driving force in the creation of successful places⁵. Historical styles and classic aesthetics can be combined with contemporary uses and applied to modern objects to create an entirely new product category. Mastership makes it possible to combine opposites in terms of style, fashion, materials and design. Some traditional crafts find a way to adapt organically to the present by associating themselves with traditional celebrations, by repurposing their objects, or by supplying other markets where the semiotics of the object are completely different from those of the local market. Unfortunately, there are many craftspeople who see their market shrinking and their skills under threat as society evolves, and they find it difficult to move with the times. This section brings together the findings of the research conducted to find ways of keeping traditional crafts relevant in today's world. The ways identified to foster traditional crafts have been grouped under four themes: context-based innovation, function-based innovation, material-based innovation and communication based innovation.

5. (Kevin E. Jones, Kristof Van Assche & John R. Parkins (2021) Reimagining craft for community development, *Local Environment*, 26:7, 908-920, DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2021.1939289)

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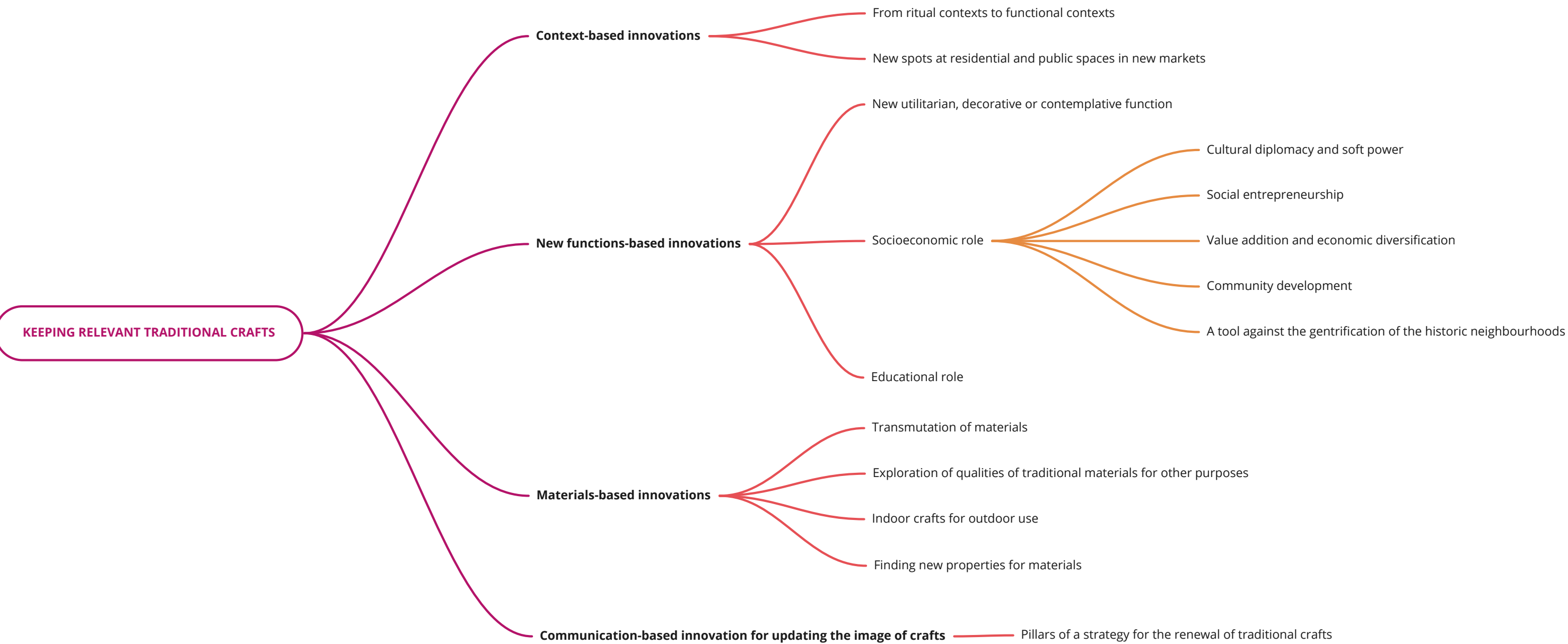


Diagram 4: Pillars of a strategy for the renewal of traditional crafts



IV

Opportunities based in new materials and new technologies

The encounter between craft and new technologies, together with the emergence of new materials, has led to a constant debate on formal, technical and conceptual issues. It is also influencing the reformulation of disciplines, objects and processes. Some of these issues are: durability versus biodegradability, the quality and value of engineered materials, the limits of delegating work from man to machine without compromising creative value, etc.

This chapter has identified the main opportunities arising from the development of new materials and new digital technologies for design and production. In the main report it is presented an overview of the paradigm shift that these innovations are bringing to the craft sector, along with the challenges they pose to the craftsperson. Despite the introduction of these technologies in the craft sector, the link and dialogue between craftsmanship and materials will continue to be the key to distinguishing craft practice, regardless of whether it is made using 3D printing or a potter's wheel.

Img.: *Noiterksa*, 2016 - 2018. Nick Ervinck
print - 200 x 150 cm - 78,7 x 59,1 inches. www.nickervinck.com

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Diagram 5: Innovation opportunities based on new materials and new technologies



Img.: Escalera. Per Brandstedt ©

V Conclusions

The conclusions that follow are based on the findings that emerged from the research.

1. Business opportunities lie in product development, but also in a combination of some of other key elements.
2. Consumer-centred approach improves the performance of craft businesses.
3. Craft as a sector has the potential to become a relevant socio-economic activity.
4. Storytelling and communication are key to the best presentation of a craft business.
5. Business management is a must in order to maintain a profitable and economically sustainable activity.
6. Authenticity of crafts is an asset to be exploited in communication.
7. Collaboration with other sectors is helpful in demonstrating the possibilities of craftsmanship, extended to new fields.
8. Traditional craftsmanship has a relevant place in today's consumer society.

VI

Recommendations

1. The redefinition of the meaning of craft and the terms associated with it need to be reviewed.
2. Developing, in conjunction with educational institutions, courses or specialisation programmes that focus on craft business management.
3. In order to expand the business, craft-specialised sales professionals are needed. Identifying and training this type of professional can help craftspeople market their products and services.
4. Explore the feasibility of designing and developing a search engine where companies from other sectors can find craftspeople willing to work with them.
5. Encouraging cross-sectoral meetings to address horizontal issues could lead to unexpected and profitable collaborations.
6. A mentoring programme, based on entrepreneurship, from senior craftspeople to newcomers could help emerging businesses avoid mistakes and build their economies more securely.
7. Meetings of representative craft organisations with major European heritage cities and national tourism authorities are urgently needed.
8. The opportunity to explore the application of blockchain technology to the traceability and authenticity of traditional crafts.



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