

Service Design: Developing A Creative Ideation and Low-Tech Rapid Prototyping Toolkit for Multicolores Embroidery Project

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Introduction. Artisan capabilities and traditional crafts has been cited by UNESCO as a method of poverty alleviation because handicrafts are home based, there are few barriers of entry, and inputs for crafts are readily available. Multicolores (Cooperativa de Alfombras de Mujeres Maya) is an association of over sixty women artisans scattered across seven communities in the Guatemalan Highlands. Founded in 2013 as the first rug hooking group in Guatemala, the rugs highlight one avenue of the evolution of Maya textile and cultural history. Through the sales of their rugs, the women earn a sustainable income allowing financial support for their families and an education for their children. (Multicolores, 2015). A new initiative, The Embroidery Project was launched in 2016. Supported by the larger cooperative, this project accommodates the aspirations of up to 30 additional artisans. The embroidery project elaborates on the model of artisan-led creative production applying creative process towards the design of a unique hand embroidered art doll. Doll sales will offer sustainable income for women and also the effort builds community, capacity, creative confidence and agency for women artisan/entrepreneurs (Wise, 2018).

Context: As part of a broader Fulbright Specialist project focusing on textile innovation, the researcher interviewed a variety of stakeholders involved in artisan textile production in Guatemala. Participants included Multicolores stakeholders involved in cooperative board, the founder and production managers. Inspired by the unique vision of the organization the researcher proposed an exercise in trust building via a service design project, offering design expertise to the organization to solve an artisan defined problem. Service designers are envisaged to have the skillset suitable to interpret local contexts, design enabling tools and platforms and generate scenarios, which provide a vision for diverse stakeholders to collaborate (Mazerella, et. al, 2017). The **Purpose** of this design research was to develop a creative ideation and low tech rapid prototyping toolkit based on artisan-defined needs and criteria. The aim was apply creative expertise responsively, toward the beneficial use and in service to others. Cross-cultural design interventions should respect and attempt to encourage artisanal creativity. In this scenario, the design researcher bridges a gap, facilitating artisans in an effort to better compete with the products and practices of modern industrialization (Craft Revival Trust, 2005).

Methodology A participatory design research approach was adopted collaboration between the researcher and participants to explore a social problem within the research context, aiding communities rather than building on theories to influence designs (Creswell,2013). **Service Design Charge:** In an effort to better understand limitations and opportunities with a new market of hand embroidered cloth dolls, board members Maryanne Wise, Reyna Isabel Pretzantzin Chipix, in two face-to-face discussions requested the following research objectives: (1) Market research into art doll market, forecasting, understanding kindred and competitor products as well as sites and strategies for sale, exhibition and funding of project via retail, tradeshow, museum and gallery (2) Material evaluation including discussion on sustainability

(recycled materials) potential fill and packaging concepts (3) a low-tech creative iteration design kits and doll templates to assist the artisans with low tech rapid prototyping and quality control. While informed by the first two objectives, this paper will focus on the third research objective.

Procedure: Primary data for market research was gathered from desktop research of publically available databases, on-site research at markets and trade shows dedicated to handmade artisan products. This report informed by fieldwork as a Fulbright Specialist through observation (informal and formal retail and production sites) as well as survey findings from 30 artisans, retailers, members of support organizations, educators and consumers. This research draws attention to opportunities in the global artisan art doll market. Further investigations reveal that Multicolores branding in terms of materials could be carried over to the new initiative with success; as consumer willingness-to-pay for recycled products versus new/conventional products made entirely of new or virgin materials is growing, findings suggest that brands have a strong “sustainability story” are more successful in marketing recycled product. Such is the case with Multicolores brand.

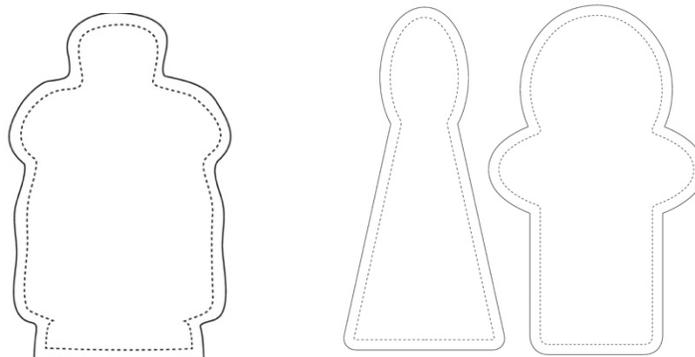


Figure 1. Example of doll prototypes

Figure 2. Example of doll and animal patterns

Design Kit/Portfolio of Features. In an effort to offer quick solutions for creative process and design development, a design kit and portfolio of features was suggested/requested by the Cooperative artisans. This enables artisans to create new designs without wasting valuable resources and time. The kits enable the artisans to test out color, scale and design features prior to putting “needle in cloth”. With embroidery, it is impossible to undo complex patterning-if something ends up not working out. The design kit features paper doll templates as well as a variety of feature shapes (eyes, nose, mouth) in an effort to inspire the embroiderer. In addition, a portfolio of features can be used as a printed inspiration catalog. Dolls patterns were developed in Adobe Illustrator and sized for ease of printing on standard sized paper. Patterns were printed out and used in a workshop training. Technology needed to be economically viable and technically feasible and fit into socio-economic fabric and environment of the local communities as well as be capable of being adapted and further developed under local conditions (Craft Revival Trust, 2005). **Findings** Initial feedback from artisans and managers suggest tools encourage individual

inspiration for the artisan. Tools functioned as a “blank canvas” with multiple options for creative customization. Templates succeeded in saving time, enhancing quality control and cohesion of products. Improvements were requested through revision of pattern sizing.

Future Research. In order to evaluate the design kit tools, a workshop will need to be conducted by the Multicolores Cooperative workshop leader (researcher will co-design workshop activity and training) for Embroidery project artisans (POST COVID when it is safe to travel.) The training will introduce the tools and resources. Artisans will then participate in a creative activity using the tools. Pre-and Post testing will be conducted to better understand the usefulness of the tools. As well, feedback will be requested six months after initial workshop to determine longer-term success of tools used by artisans on their own/outside of the cooperative. Testing was paused do to COVID, however, collaborative development has continued and the project has expanded. A blouse toolkit is now being tested with the artisans.

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