

# Just Craft: Capabilities and Empowerment in Participatory Craft Projects

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## Introduction

In the past few decades, we have seen design's becoming "provocative," "adversarial," "activist," and "disruptive," often building on the frameworks constructed by Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière.<sup>1</sup> Many of these approaches suggest discursive provocations and small-scale interventions to raise awareness and suggest tactical solutions but do not necessarily generate knowledge about what practical or social changes actually are wrought by the projects. In this paper, we regard craft as a form of making "publics" from the perspective of the capabilities approach. Through the application of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, we argue that several complex agencies developed during craft empowerment projects can be revealed and better understood. Hence, this approach can help designers push for change in praxis. A change in praxis might in some sense be a provocative contribution because it identifies ways of amplifying a practical "voice" in artisan practices so that action and mobilization lead to further economic social agency and autonomy.

## "Empowerment"?

Development studies have transitioned from a focus on providing aid to a focus on facilitating participatory self-help; in this transition, designers have come to use participation to help communities of practice to design for social good. As a response and in contrast to design that focuses narrowly on the market, this view considers the "real world" referenced by Papanek's call to action.<sup>2</sup> In many "social innovation" projects, designers aim to invigorate local economies and livelihoods by helping artisans to use their crafts as a means to empowerment. Here, the ideas of "open innovation" meet the ideas of "co-creation" to give rise to socially committed design endeavors that diminish the suffering of the poorest.<sup>3</sup> These endeavors often include facilitating co-design processes, in which designers and artisans review traditional

1 See, e.g., Carl DiSalvo, *Adversarial Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); and Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Ann Thorpe, "Design as Activism: A Conceptual Tool," paper in the proceedings of *Changing the Change* conference (Turin, Italy, July 10–12, 2008); and Thomas Markusen, "The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics," *Design Issues* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 38–50. For the frameworks of Mouffe and Rancière, see e.g., Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004); and Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010).

2 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

3 See respectively, Henry Chesbrough, *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2003); Coimbatore Krishna Prahalad and Mayuram S. Krishnan, *The New Age of Innovation: Driving Co-created Value Through Global Networks* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008); Coimbatore Krishna Prahalad (Philadelphia, PA: Wharton School Publishing, 2005); and Coimbatore Krishna Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy, *The Future of Competition: Co-creating Unique Value with Customers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2013).

crafts and markets, develop new designs and techniques, and amplify these initiatives to reach bigger markets and production goals. Such changes often occur in small-change interventions or market-oriented “frugal” or “jugaad” innovations.<sup>4</sup> Critique has also been leveraged against the market-induced frameworks of poverty and frugality as modes of innovation. For example, as a part of a wider method for working within resource constraints, the “jugaad” term also can connote corruption, as well as “low-level, border-line criminal activity in the informal economy,” which makes people often unwilling participants in such systemic “deficits.”<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, many projects focused on “empowerment,” in which designers and craftspeople work together, bring colonial baggage into question in the realm of production. Craft production could not compete with mass production of well-developed, differentiated, and accessible consumer goods designed with modernist principles. In light of such “western” industrialization, modes of production in non-western contexts, including craft, had to be either abandoned or transformed for tourists’ consumption, exoticizing some of their fundamental features. Hence, from another perspective, craft embodies the power to break free from the reductionism of global mass production, particularly as awareness of decolonization increases among those in the design community.

Still, some essential questions in these designer–crafts-person collaboration projects remain to be answered around the very concept of “empowerment.” Therefore, in this article we argue that concerns with empowerment should go beyond measures of market success with designed products; empowerment also must include infrastructuring that leads toward increasing the capabilities of practitioners. This infrastructure might involve education; providing funding, resources, and supervision for marketing; and design assistance. In this article we discuss the complexity of empowerment based on two projects: The Jawaja Project in India and the Doğal Boya Araştırma ve Geliştirme Projesi [Natural Dye Research and Development Project] (DOBAG Project) in Turkey. Here, our aim is to indicate how each craft empowerment project has a different nature and dynamics, and each project thus requires the creation of a critical framework to better differentiate between various forms of “empowerment” in participatory design projects. Empowering results can’t be assumed simply because people join in to meet, to write on post-its, and to make a prototype; even this articulates an issue which, in the end, is either not addressed or alters relationships of agency and leverage.<sup>6</sup>

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- 4 For the former, see Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change: About the Art of Practice and the Limits of Planning in Cities* (London: Earthscan, 2004). For the latter, see Navi Radjou, Jaideep Prabhu, and Simone Ahuja, *Jugaad Innovation: Think Frugal, Be Flexible, Generate Breakthrough Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012); Navi Radjou and Jaideep Prabhu, *Frugal Innovation: How to do More with Less* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014); and Charles Leadbeater, *The Frugal Innovator: Creating Change on a Shoestring Budget* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
- 5 Thomas Birtchnell, “Jugaad as Systemic Risk and Disruptive Innovation in India,” *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 4 (2011): 357–72.
- 6 Ezio Manzini, *Design When Everybody Designs* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 66.

With subjects and the scope of their agency at its center, we find the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum could be a tool for critically expanding some of the concerns in using craft as a means for empowerment. With Sen and Nussbaum's distinction between "internal" and "external" capabilities, we create an analytical framework with which to examine and evaluate the effect of participatory crafts on community autonomy and to advance social justice beyond economic benefit, following the framework of John Alexander.<sup>7</sup>

Earl Tai argues that designers tend to think that design's contribution to justice is usually in the form of distributional justice: making things cheap and accessible.<sup>8</sup> However, as Richard Sennett posits, production situates the role and standing of the citizen in society. For example, in ancient Greece:

The workshop spawned an idea of justice, that the things people made cannot be seized from them arbitrarily, and it enjoyed a kind of political autonomy, at least in Greece, since artisans were allowed to make their own decisions about how best to practice their craft.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the control imbued in the work of the artisan is central to understanding the position of craft in the realm of social production; in addition, the direct action of capabilities also moves the notion of justice from sympathy toward commitment and engagement, as Alexander argues.<sup>10</sup> With the industrial revolution, Taylorism, and Fordism, the craftsperson and worker were in struggle over, and in the end stripped of control, which also in many cases coincided with the formal delegation of power from community to market or to parliament.<sup>11</sup> Because of what was lost in the rise of industrialism and the power shift to market forces, "participation," in its designerly sense, needs more thorough examination.<sup>12</sup>

### **Just Things: Design and the Question of Justice**

The ideas of political philosopher John Rawls have been important in the developments of social and global justice. As Rawls notes, "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."<sup>13</sup> From Rawls' perspective, the idea of justice can be imagined from a withdrawn "original position," that is, a hypothetical perspective from where observers may form an agreement between their perspectives. Building on this foundation, if designers take Buchanan's call for human dignity and human rights as guiding principles,<sup>14</sup> they will very soon encounter the troubling intersections with the relationships to the concept

7 John Alexander, *Capabilities and Social Justice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

8 Earl Tai, "A Case for Distributive Justice in Design" in *Design Studies: A Reader*, eds. Hazel Clark and David Brody (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

9 Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 57.

10 Alexander, *Capabilities and Social Justice*, 22.

11 Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2013)

12 Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London: Zed, 2001).

13 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3

14 Richard Buchanan, "Human Dignity and Human Rights: Thoughts on the Principles of Human-centered Design," *Design Issues* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 35–39.

of justice. Indeed, the “Thing,” as highlighted by Latour and Weibel, is in itself a parliamentary conflict—a struggle between competing political world views or priorities.<sup>15</sup> From their perspective, every object is thus a parliament of oppositional contestations, building on the original “thing” that Heidegger mentions is the Norse court—the “allthing”—which was an arena where justice, punishment, or retribution was enacted.<sup>16</sup> The “thing” as object in the sense of “objective”—the principled desire for fairness, equity, and justice—may be a judicial illusion.

All things are, in some way, unjust because their investment in asymmetric power is never fully resolved. Artifacts are inherently normative, as Winner suggests, which gives every design an inherent ethic.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, designs propel an agenda and thus can never be “neutral,” says Verbeek.<sup>18</sup> Although the apparent “democratization” of mass production has immensely improved users’ everyday lives by providing accessibility to a better use experience, this dissemination of goods simultaneously veil the unequal distribution of means inherent in more fundamental issues such as agency and political influence.<sup>19</sup> Craft is one of the practices that involves a different kind of democratization: the well-being that comes from being heard, in product form, and thus brings positive freedom of doing and being.<sup>20</sup> At its best, craft as a capability can be a manifestation of dignity, or as Sennett suggests, craft can make people “anchored in tangible reality, and they can take pride in their work.”<sup>21</sup> As discussed, the “dissensus” around these issues related to empowerment might be a good thing—in a manner similar to Hampshire’s view on the concept of justice as an unresolvable and endless conflict. As Hampshire highlights, the conflict of justice is not primarily discursive, but existential.<sup>22</sup>

One way to look at how making and craft might voice opposing positions and stances on justice is to see craft as a form of provocation. A provocation, from the Latin *prōvocō* (“call forth, challenge”), “voices” something. It challenges a “consensus” built on silence—or rather, it voices a silenced opinion and position. If we think of empowerment as creating leverage for a weak or silenced part of a negotiation, this shift in power relations serves as provocation for a silenced voice of craft, now backed by the agency available in making tangible traces in the world. In this way, empowerment through making and craft resonates well with Hannah Arendt’s perspective on praxis.<sup>23</sup> Although Sennett makes his perspective on craft distinct from Arendt’s “praxis” in *The Craftsman*, he gravitates toward a praxis-oriented perspective in *Together*.<sup>24</sup> As in Arendt’s work, the act of acting and making

15 Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

16 Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971): 163–84.

17 Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts have Politics?,” *Daedalus* 190, no. 1 (1980): 121–36.

18 Peter-Paul Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology: Understanding and Designing the Morality of Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

19 Tai, “A Case for Distributive Justice in Design.”

20 Ilse Oosterlaken, “Design for Development: A Capability Approach,” *Design Issues* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 91–102.

21 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 21.

22 Stuart Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

23 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).

24 See Sennett’s prologue to *The Craftsman*; and Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*.

together is what forms humans as fully human, autonomous, and possibly virtuous. Although the production of things often requires some form of collaborative practice, the operationalization of “capability-sensitive design,” based on the capabilities approach, might be possible for design endeavors.<sup>25</sup> The criteria for success in such types of design projects must be measured more broadly, putting craft agency and praxis at its center.

### Applying the Capabilities Approach to Craft

Identifying and cultivating capabilities can be an evaluative factor for tracing empowerment in design and craft projects. One of Sen’s fundamental critiques of the economic perspective on societal development is that it merely measures development through people’s access to commodities or services.<sup>26</sup> As Sen argues, possessing a commodity does not mean that one is able to use it; instead, the focus should be on “what the person succeeds in *doing* with the commodities and characteristics at his or her command.”<sup>27</sup> To Sen, capabilities should be understood as *what a person is able to do and be*. The objects themselves, the goods and their distribution, are thus of secondary importance. The primary concern is how capabilities ensure *entitlements* to social goods.<sup>28</sup>

Of central importance to our study is Sen’s distinction between *internal* and *external* capabilities—that is, between inner abilities and the material, cultural, and social opportunities to enact them in the world. Nussbaum argues that capabilities “are not just abilities residing inside a person but also freedoms and opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment.”<sup>29</sup> Sen and Nussbaum differ slightly in their exact use of the terms, which have also developed over time, but simply put, the internal capabilities in Nussbaum’s words are “the characteristics of a person (personality traits, intellectual and emotional capacities, states of bodily fitness and health, internalized learning, skills of perception and movement).”<sup>30</sup> The external circumstances, such as the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions, might support or undermine the person’s use of capabilities for flourishing. However, as Sen and Nussbaum both emphasize, external capabilities are not simply circumstances or structural constraints but can be affected and tuned and shaped by collective initiatives intended to influence opportunities.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the capabilities approach provides a basis for critical argumentation of craft empowerment.

The *ability* used in craft allows us, for example, to choose whether we take on a repair job ourselves or leave it to the mechanic. Having access to tools or a workshop, or other external support, increases the effectiveness of the capability and also multiplies possibilities for further developments. Says Nussbaum, “[t]

25 Ilse Oosterlaken, “Design for Development: A Capability Approach,” 96.

26 Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1985).

27 *Ibid.*, 10.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011), 20.

30 *Ibid.*, 21.

31 David Crocker, *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171ff; Ingrid Robeyns, “The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey,” *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 1 (2005): 99.

he notion of *freedom to choose* is thus built into the notion of capability.... To promote capabilities is to promote areas of freedom.”<sup>32</sup> This notion of “areas of freedom” was later referred to as “fertile functionings” by Wolff and De-Shalit.<sup>33</sup>

The cultivation of capabilities toward “empowerment” and social justice attends to the complex dynamic between internal and external capabilities—between personal abilities and their social, material, and cultural avenues for realization.

### The Evaluative Framework and Diagram

Almost all design is meant to somehow enhance human capabilities. But the question of justice looks at the distribution of such agency, asking who gains or loses leverage, on both societal and global levels. Critics of the capabilities approach have highlighted its focus on individual actors, as it risks missing larger collectives and societal contexts, or is overtly entrepreneurial and liberal.<sup>34</sup> However, as Alkire notes, focusing on the individual agent for purposes of ethical individualism, for treating each person as an end, and for emphasizing agency in the making still offers the possibility of opening up toward people, communities, and social groups, thus offering a perspective that is highly needed by craft communities.<sup>35</sup>

As Oosterlaken highlights, the emphasis of the capabilities approaches on agency, ability, choice, and value judgments makes the approach applicable to design processes that have to cope with various levels of disagreement.<sup>36</sup> Even more, design at its best can add empowerment beyond the narrow scope of commerce. Citing Sen, Kasturi sees how a capabilities approach helps “take note of [design’s] direct relevance to the well-being and freedom of the craftsperson.”<sup>37</sup>

In participatory craft empowerment projects, the level of internal and external capabilities and their intertwined co-development play a role in the sustained agency of participants. For example, craftspeople might be exceptionally skilled and equipped with internal capabilities, but the resources allocated for the project and their external capabilities might not be sufficient to sustain the project; or collaboration with formal stakeholders, including designers, might result in the participants’ being reduced to their labor. Information about how an artifact intersected with capabilities might be neglected if the sole focus is on the produced artifact. Meanwhile, structured resources and infrastructure, such as funding, guiding, and proper tools, might be available, but the participants might not have cultivated the internal capabilities (e.g., skills and motivation) to use or maintain the infrastructure, also as the introduction of new infrastructure may clash with traditions and habitual craft practices.

32 Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 25.

33 Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

34 For the former critique, see, e.g., Frances Stewart, “Groups and Capabilities,” *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 2 (2005): 185–204; and Peter Evans, “Collective Capabilities, Culture, and Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom*,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37, no. 2 (2002): 54–60. For the latter critique, see Severine Deneulin, “Perfectionism, Paternalism and Liberalism in Sen and Nussbaum’s Capability Approach,” *Review of Political Economy* 14, no. 4 (2002): 497–518.

35 Sabina Alkire, “Using the Capability Approach: Prospective and Evaluative Analyses,” *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Applications*, eds. Flavio Comim, Mozaffar Qizilbash, and Sabina Alkire (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 26–50.

36 Ilse Oosterlaken, “Design for Development: A Capability Approach,” 100ff.

37 Sen cited in Poonam Bir Kasturi, “Designing Freedom,” *Design Issues* 21, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 77.

CAPABILITIES/EMPOWERMENT

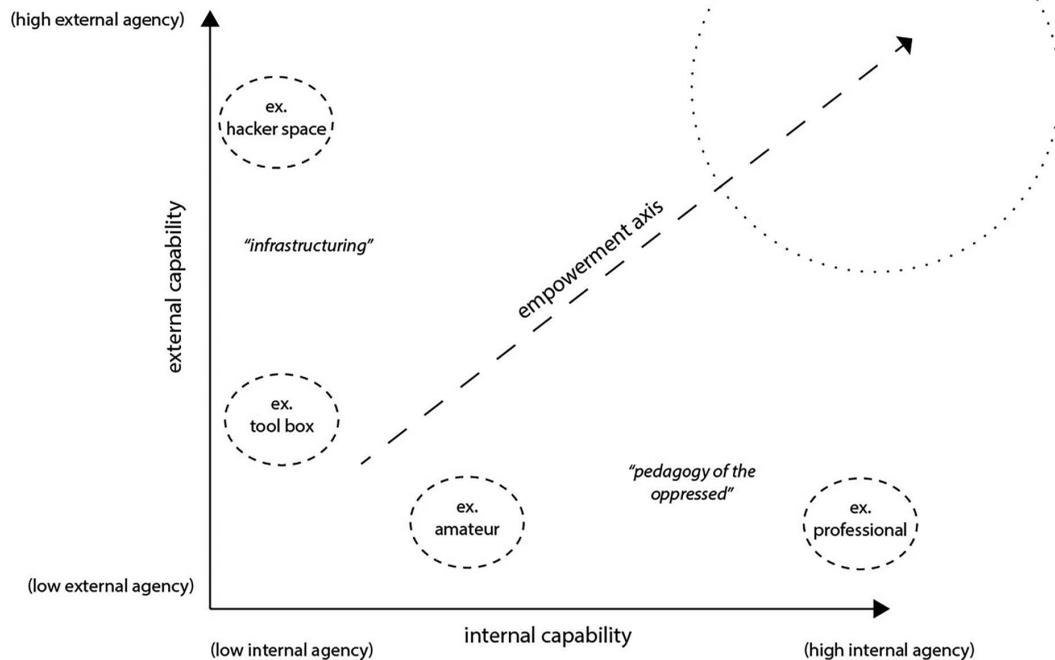


Figure 1  
General evaluative framework.

To allow for critical examination of empowerment and social inclusion, the capabilities approach helps critics to examine how and whose empowerment is at stake. Figure 1 shows an evaluation tool prototype we’ve developed for this purpose. Internal and external capabilities are located on each axis, and the diagonal represents the maximum effect where internal and external capabilities are equally present.

Higher internal capabilities mean higher personal skills and control—for example, learning a craft and developing command over how one’s skills are employed in conjunction with other abilities. The axis stretches from the amateur and hobbyist, to the professional and expert. Projects supporting internal capabilities usually involve pedagogical elements and skill-building, from artisanal skills to self-marketing, from simple hands-on tasks to complex systemic processes.

Higher external capabilities, meanwhile, provide infrastructure, organization, and an opportunity for realizing the potential of one’s ideas. This infrastructure is not neutral, but exerts its own asymmetries of power, and thus has its own “ethnography.”<sup>38</sup> In the case of craft tools, this axis stretches from a simple toolbox, to the studio, and on to the fully equipped workshop. In a broader sense, it also might depend on access to markets and distribution, and to how the craft produces “fertile functionings”—empowerment in the form of civic participation, or giving voice to cultural

38 See, e.g., Susan Leigh Star, “The Ethnography of Infrastructure,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (1999): 377–91; see also Paul Edwards, “Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems,” in *Modernity and Technology*, eds. Thomas Misa, Philip Brey and Andrew Feenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

**Table 1 | General Evaluative Framework***Some internal and external capabilities in Jawaja and DOBAG projects identified from the available resources*

	Internal Capabilities	External Capabilities	Stakeholders
<b>Jawaja</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dyeing</li> <li>• Spinning</li> <li>• Weaving</li> <li>• Leatherworking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Institute of Design (NID) faculty providing design assistance</li> <li>• Products sold at NIDUS (NID's design store)</li> <li>• Owned few looms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NID</li> <li>• India Institute of Management</li> <li>• Artisans' associations</li> </ul>
<b>DOBAG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carpet weaving by women learned through generations</li> <li>• No prior training or ability to reach external markets without intermediaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of academic knowledge for quality improvement and consulting</li> <li>• Support, funding, and loans by institutions, such as the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation, the Turkish government, and local governments</li> <li>• Management skills formed in cooperatives</li> <li>• Quality hallmark provided to carpets</li> <li>• Reaching international markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German Ministry for Economic Cooperation</li> <li>• Turkish Forest Ministry</li> <li>• Government of Turkey</li> <li>• Local governing bodies of the region</li> <li>• Marmara University, Fine Arts</li> <li>• Faculty (former DTGSY)</li> <li>• Carpet cooperatives (after they are established)</li> <li>• Dealers and tourists</li> </ul>

39 See e.g., Per-Anders Hillgren, Anna Seravalli, and Anders Emilson, "Prototyping and Infrastructuring in Design for Social Innovation," *CoDesign* 7, nos. 3–4 (2011): 169–83.

40 Eric von Hippel, *Democratizing Innovation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

41 Jonathan Lukens, "DIY Infrastructure and the Scope of Design Practice," *Design Issues* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 14–27.

42 These projects function in this article to explain the diagram shown in Figure 1. The cases were selected according to their aims and infrastructuring approaches and to portray the capabilities approach in craft empowerment. Although empowerment has indicators that can be identified as best practices for incorporating both external and internal capabilities, it is used here to indicate the effect on the community instead of on an individual. The degree of empowerment the two projects offer varies both in time and from one project to the other.

43 Lukens, "DIY infrastructure."

44 For the Jawaja Project, see e.g., "The Jawaja Leather Association," <http://www.jawajaleather.com/> (accessed March 24, 2017); Ashoke Chatterjee, interview by Carolyn Jongeward, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/523/523%20interview%20>

expressions. The amplification of external capabilities can involve various levels of designerly "infrastructuring." That is, infrastructuring in the form of tuning tools, equipping workshops, and creating platforms might be undertaken in hacker spaces, or as practical pedagogies and skill-building.<sup>39</sup> Design infrastructuring in its most instrumental form is perhaps the technological perspective of von Hippel, in which "democratization" in innovation and design primarily relates to technologies.<sup>40</sup> A more radical DIY version involves questioning the "radical monopoly" and the inherent control of the infrastructure.<sup>41</sup>

### Two Cases of Craftsmanship: The Jawaja Project and the DOBAG Project

Among the numerous craft empowerment projects that display more inclusive and social forms of infrastructuring, we chose to examine two long-term projects: the Jawaja Project and the DOBAG project.<sup>42</sup> They also involved a range of stakeholders and funders, including both government bodies and NGOs. (See Table 1 for a partial list.) These projects have been supporting local production, not only for people's well-being, but also as an alternative to the monopoly held by industrial production, as criticized by Lukens.<sup>43</sup> A solid external infrastructure provided for both of these projects has sustained The Jawaja Project for more than 40 years (since 1975) and DOBAG for more than 35 years (since 1981).<sup>44</sup> Economic and capabilities indicators stemming from these cases during their long life provide valuable information that can be studied and conceptualized using the capabilities approach, showing their potential to increase capabilities that might also empower craftspeople.

The Jawaja Project in India can be seen as an effective craft empowerment project because its aim was to assist communities to make local production an economic asset. T. V. Rao, who worked with Ravi J. Matthai during the project, states that the project was initiated while identifying problems of education in Rajasthan in the early 1970s, and it was extended by Matthai to foster the communities' production skills, thus leading to financial stability by aligning the learning about design and management with communities' self-improvement.<sup>45</sup> Matthai articulates the desire for community members to sustain and expand their knowledge and production for independence this way:

The solution must be found in his attitudes towards solving his own problems, in managing his own affairs, in working in groups, and in being able to make demands on his environment. While the change he needs is simultaneously technological, economic, and social, in this case the stress is on economic change. His social problem relates more to his ability to work with others.<sup>46</sup>

In this regard, in addition to design guidance, marketing knowledge was part of the capabilities provided during product development processes for empowerment.<sup>47</sup> Chatterjee reported that the economically disadvantaged community in Jawaja had weaving and leatherworking skills, which were seen as assets for the empowerment of the community through design interventions guided by the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad in the field.<sup>48</sup> Chatterjee emphasizes that a core value of this project is the co-development of design between designers and craftspeople to allow for independent further growth of craft communities:

While there has been tremendous interaction between designers and craftspeople at Jawaja, the designers worked within certain constraints. The designs had to be what the weavers could understand, respond to, modify, and develop. If the weavers were just sent a design, they would be in no position to take ownership, and we were keen that they have design ownership.<sup>49</sup>

Craftspeople thus were encouraged to have a voice in developing products and to be involved in their development. In addition, the pedagogical approach included a perspective wherein educated craftspeople would share their acquired experiences and knowledge with other craftspeople, allowing for a systematic knowledge and experience dissemination approach.<sup>50</sup> Another feature both Matthai and Chatterjee emphasize is that, by avoiding commissioners, the community can be financially stronger and more independent.<sup>51</sup> Matthai reports that, through external

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with%20ashoke%20chatterjee.htm (accessed March 24, 2017); M. P. Ranjan, "Poverty and The Village Economy: Design Strategies for India," *Design for India Blog*, <http://design-for-india.blogspot.com.tr/2008/04/poverty-and-village-economy-design.html>; (accessed March 24, 2017); "Artisans' Alliance of Jawaja," [http://aajweavers.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=483](http://aajweavers.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=483) (accessed March 24, 2017). For the DOBAG Project, see e.g., June Anderson, *Return to Tradition: The Revitalization of Turkish Village Carpets* (Seattle and London: California Academy of Sciences in association with the University of Washington Press, 1998): 1.

45 T. V. Rao., <http://tvraoblogs.blogspot.com.tr/2014/03/ravi-matthais-jawaja-experiment.html> (accessed October 29, 2016).

46 Ravi J. Matthai, Helena Perheentupa, Nilam Iyer, and Ravinder Kaur, "Learning for Development at Jawaja," *India International Centre Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1984): 105 (by "his" the authors points to Hindu deity Ganesha).

47 Ibid., 106–10.

48 Chatterjee, interview by Jongeward. The majority of Chatterjee's experiences on the design guidance provided by the National Institute of Design (NID) as a stakeholder in the project are based on this interview, conducted on October 20, 1997.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.; see also Matthai et al., "Learning for Development at Jawaja," 110.

51 Chatterjee, interview by Jongeward; Matthai et al., "Learning for Development at Jawaja," 106.

assistance, the existing leatherworking and weaving experience of the community were used in making new products.<sup>52</sup> Other researchers also state the empowering collaborations between craftspeople and designers in Jawaja by referring to new leather and fabric products hand-made by craftspeople.<sup>53</sup> Today, weaving and leather craftspeople of Jawaja have gathered their activities under Jawaja Weaver's Association and Jawaja Leather Association, joined at Artisans Alliance of Jawaja, indicating that the project in time has gained an institutional character.<sup>54</sup>

It can be argued that The Jawaja Project has led to sustainable empowerment, instead of a sugar coating of craft with design; IIM and NID, as two major national institutional bodies, have provided continuous external capabilities to foster craftspeople's internal capabilities. A shared understanding of design and craft and the sustained external support of institutions result in valuable perspectives for empowerment by design from exploiting craft solely for monetary gains. Based on the experiences presented in The Jawaja Project, the quality and ethics of craft empowerment require sharing hands-on, lived experiences with the community in the field. As with Balaram's "barefoot" designer from the 1970s, the need is to combine design with the skillful but disadvantaged peoples of India for wider inclusion by design practice.<sup>55</sup>

The accounts of Chatterjee and Matthai reveal that the external capabilities provided by institutions played a role not only in initiating The Jawaja Project but also sustaining it; the result was the export of branded, well-crafted products.<sup>56</sup> The project has done remarkably well, despite its being started with local resources from scratch and its lack of the massive amount of infrastructure used by formal industrial brands. From a capabilities approach, by cleverly and mindfully marrying external and internal capabilities for people's well-being, the project provides indicators, as shown in Table 1, that locate it on the diagonal praxis axis of the diagram.

DOBAG took a slightly different route than The Jawaja Project. The project was first built around scientific experiments to replace artificial dyes with natural ones in traditional Turkish carpets because the wide use of artificial dyes in time decreased the quality and economic value of the craft.<sup>57</sup> Essential components of the project were educating village weavers who had dyeing skills and later establishing a cooperative management format.<sup>58</sup> Anderson gives a detailed account of the DOBAG project, naming a number of stakeholders who actively took part in, supported, or funded the project.<sup>59</sup> She reports that DOBAG developed the carpet-weaving community in weaving villages in Western Turkey through technical, artistic, and financial means, adding value to carpets based on the scientific research of Harald Böhmer,

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- 52 Matthai, et al., "Learning for Development at Jawaja," 107–10.
- 53 H. Kumar Vyas, "The Designer and the Socio-technology of Small Production," *Journal of Design History* 4, no. 3 (1991): 204–5; Uday Athavankar, "Design in Search of Roots: An Indian Experience," *Design Issues* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 47–8, see esp. Figures 5 and 6.
- 54 Artisans Alliance of Jawaja Weavers, [http://aajweavers.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=483](http://aajweavers.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=483) (accessed March 25, 2017).
- 55 Singanapalli Balaram, "Design Pedagogy in India: A Perspective," *Design Issues* 21, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 20.
- 56 In his interview with Jongewald, Chatterjee reports that international confederation of charitable organizations OXFAM was one of the project's clients.
- 57 Anderson, *Return to Tradition*, 3–7; Harald Böhmer, "DOBAG Projesi Üzerine," [On DOBAG Project] *Türkiyemiz* [Our Turkey] 42, (February 1984): 1–5; Mustafa Aslier, "Marmara Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi DOBAG Projesi," [Marmara University Fine Arts Faculty DOBAG Project] *Kültür ve Sanat* [Culture and Art] 1, (December 1988): 20–5; and Şerife Atlıhan, *Yardımcı Doçentlik Başvuru Dosyası* [Assistant Professorship Application Portfolio] (Istanbul: Marmara University Fine Arts Faculty, 1991): 172.
- 58 Atlıhan, "Yardımcı Doçentlik Başvuru Dosyası," 172–74; Böhmer, "DOBAG Projesi Üzerine," 1–5; Aslier, "Marmara Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi DOBAG Projesi," 20–25.
- 59 Anderson, *Return to Tradition: The Revitalization of Turkish Village Carpets*, 1–73.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 3–15.

62 Anderson, *Return to Tradition: The Revitalization of Turkish Village Carpets*, 13; Atlıhan, “Yardımcı Doçentlik Başvuru Dosyası,” 174; and Aslier, “Marmara Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi DOBAG Projesi,” 24.

63 Böhmer, “DOBAG” Projesi Üzerine, 1–5; Aslier, “Marmara Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi DOBAG Projesi,” 20–25; and Atlıhan, “Yardımcı Doçentlik Başvuru Dosyası,” 172–74.

64 Anderson, *Return to Tradition: The Revitalization of Turkish Village Carpets*, 13; and Atlıhan, “Yardımcı Doçentlik Başvuru Dosyası,” 173.

65 Aslier, “Marmara Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi DOBAG Projesi,” 20–25; Anderson, *Return to Tradition: The Revitalization of Turkish Village Carpets*, 1–73. Many accounts on the project indicate that the weaver communities were financially empowered because of fewer intermediaries, enhanced marketing activities, and changes in how women were paid. (They were paid by the knot instead of based on the size of the carpet, which made the smaller pieces requiring more intensive labor more valuable.) As a result, the community members not only achieved financial empowerment, but the weaver women also gained a voice in their craft and its management. In later research, Kimberly Hart and Damla Isik identified the influence of gender and changing power relationships. For example, Hart states that in one of the cooperatives, some leading stakeholders became more powerful than others, and after 2003 weaver women compared their benefits with workers in cities and some of them moved to cities, causing a decline in carpet production and in the cooperative’s activities. Hence, the levels of empowerment changed over time. Kimberly Hart, “The Decline of a Weaving Cooperative in Western Turkey” in *Textile Economies: Power and Value from the Local to the Transnational*, eds. Walter E. Little and Patricia A. McNany (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2001): 245–61.

a German science teacher who studied authentic natural dyes and had worked in Turkey since the 1970s.<sup>60</sup> According to Anderson, since the initiation of the DOBAG project in 1981, the project and its two consequent cooperatives—one of which is owned by women—grew with the involvement and support of a number of researchers and institutions. The initial focus on improvement in dyeing using natural pigments, as in authentic practice, was extended to communicating the value and quality of the carpets bearing a DOBAG hallmark in the international market.<sup>61</sup> In addition, and similar to The Jawaja Project, the DOBAG aimed at a more direct relationship with end buyers.<sup>62</sup> Accounts of the project indicate that a number of research, education, and project dissemination activities were held at different venues, including both village settings and the marketing venues and exhibitions set up under the academic supervision of Marmara University Fine Arts Faculty.<sup>63</sup> Serife Atlıhan, a member of the faculty in the Traditional Handicraft Department of Marmara University, made several visits to the carpet-weaving villages to facilitate adoption of the dyes and to study the quality of the carpets, as well as to provide assistance with technical problems.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, commitment to replacing the artificial dyes used in the traditional carpets hand-woven by women in villages with the natural dyes to enhance their color quality also brought economic benefit as part of a larger development framework.<sup>65</sup>

Similar to The Jawaja Project, the power of DOBAG is in our opinion potentially in the co-existence of external and internal capabilities. Education, peer learning, interaction between those with formal and informal craft and design knowledge, and establishment of cooperatives were part of both projects. Although marketing success and reaching external markets were inseparable from the financial empowerment sought in both projects, such strategies were used not just to market good products. They both had an education component, and they both adopted a cooperative management style, whereby the artisans had more direct control in the project’s management.

The diagram and evaluative framework from the capabilities approach can provide a tool to trace the empowering effect of participatory craft projects for critical investigations to see how future projects can be improved to secure empowerment and to sustain the effects. Ultimately, the two axes are not a metric of justice; instead, they represent agency, which is crucial in striving for just empowerment.

To better explain the meaning and value of the diagonal axis, which shows that projects aim at reaching higher agency, we added the two cases hypothetically along the empowerment

CAPABILITIES/EMPOWERMENT

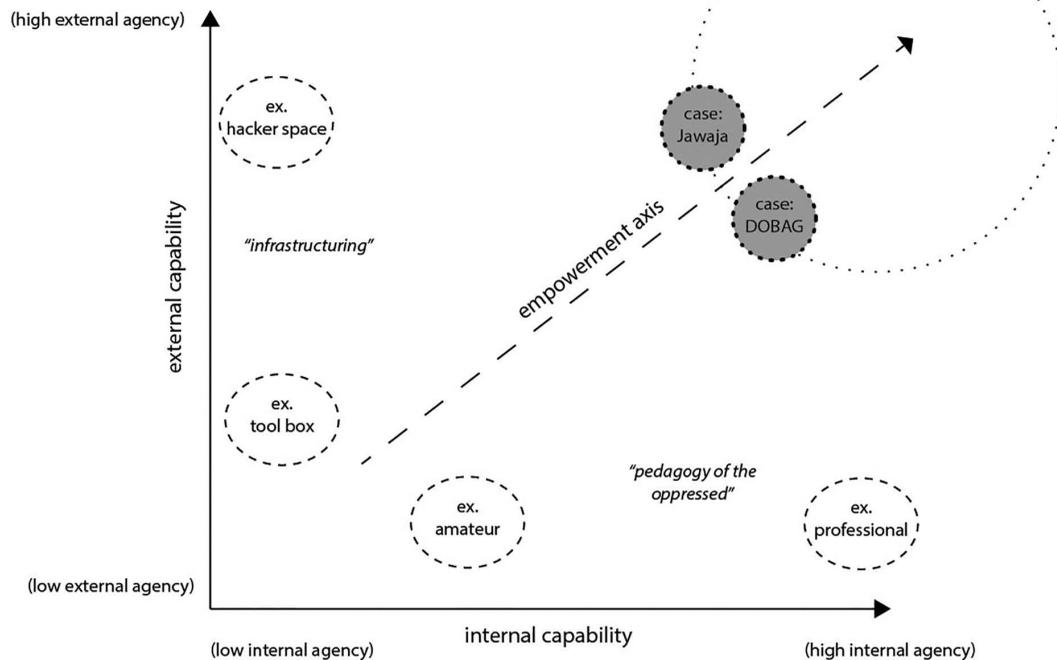


Figure 2  
Evaluative framework incorporating the  
Jawaja and DOBAG projects.

diagonal of the diagram, as shown in Figure 2. The mutual increase in both axes is a mutual reinforcement of internal and external capabilities toward a zone of self-reliance, as in Freire’s tradition of “pedagogy of the oppressed,” as in critical pedagogy or “critical making,” or even as “DIY citizenship.”<sup>66</sup> Along this diagonal, between the external and internal axes, a field of empowerment in light of the capabilities approach grows. We also frame this field in correspondence with Hannah Arendt’s concept of “praxis,” which in turn resonates well with Tomás Maldonado’s general theory of “design praxis.”<sup>67</sup>

Empowerment and social justice are more complex than simply increased capabilities for all. In the cases presented, we cannot argue that they exemplify neither social justice nor equal participation because these sociological issues are both complex and hard to capture. Chatterjee explains that “self-reliance,” as such, is an extremely difficult and even ambitious aim:

It is difficult to summarize where we are now. The people of Jawaja are now self-reliant over many things for which they were totally dependent in the past. But what right did we have to expect this community to be totally self-reliant?<sup>68</sup>

66 See, respectively, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Matt Ratto, “Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life,” *The Information Society* 27, no. 4 (2011): 252–60; and Matt Ratto and Megan Boler, *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

67 See Arendt, *The Human Condition*; and Tomás Maldonado, *Design, Nature, and Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

68 Chatterjee, interview by Carolyn Jongeward.

Similarly, Hart argues that management relations and gender, as part of external capabilities, played a role in the changing empowerment of the DOBAG community<sup>69</sup>; and Isik reports other factors of change in the project, such as immigration, change in currency values, and other employment opportunities.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the value of the diagonal of the table should not be misinterpreted in too simplified a manner. Having the potential to provide the best autonomy possible should not conceal the fact that pitfalls and weaknesses always present challenges and that autonomy and contribution to social justice can and should always be improved over time. We introduce these concepts as components of the overall aim of an idealized empowerment through craft, which even if never fully achieved still deserves conceptualization.

### Conclusion and Future Research

Participation in design is no easy “thing,” but an engagement with conflicting forces, interests, and values—of human as well as non-human actors. What we have suggested is a framework that might contribute to evaluating what “empowerment” can be in craft projects. The framework puts action and making at its gravitational center, rather than discursive disagreements or projects to raise awareness.

Because the internal and external capabilities are different in each case, and because they change over time, their location on the empowerment diagram can migrate. Our hope is that the diagram can serve those who examine and compare the relationships between cases, who have critical concerns about whether the intended empowerment is achieved or not and who apply a more “designerly” approach to evaluating capabilities. In this sense, the capabilities approach and the diagram provide an analytical tool for empowerment projects. We hope it can help these designers ask the fundamental questions about how to improve a project for its real owners, who are craftspeople, while also improving products. Crafts previously have been excluded from the development of industry, and have thus failed to have significant influential interface with modernity. As design became “modern” and “progressive,” crafts became “traditional” and “backward,” so that crafts have been placed at the mercy of those who would rediscover and reinvent them. As craft empowerment and social inclusion projects increase, the voices and agency of makers whose knowledge could not find a place in industrial systems can come forward. In this article, we underline how this agency could be addressed, and how it must be different from dominant design paradigms, such as design for development, benefit, and profit. Empowerment is a combination of external and internal capabilities, cultured and trained, rather than smart designs parachuted in by “change

69 Kimberly Hart, “Conflicts and Conundrums in a Women’s Cooperative in Western Turkey,” *HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 9, no. 1 (2011): 25–42; Kimberly Hart, “Culture Brokers: Weavers, Photographers, Scientists, and Textile Experts,” in *Textiles as Cultural Expressions: Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America*, September 24–27, 2008, Honolulu, Hawaii Paper 275, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/275/> (accessed March 24, 2017); and Hart, “The Decline of a Weaving Cooperative in Western Turkey,” 245–61.

70 Damla Isik, “Woven Assemblages: Globalization, Gender, Labor, and Authenticity in Turkey’s Carpet Industry” (PhD dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2007), 371–72.

agents.” Strengthening both internal and external capabilities together helps to sustain the project’s influence. Hence, linking the empowerment of crafts and the capabilities approach might help designers placed in the field to think and listen twice, to seek greater and more long-term involvement of craftspeople, and to support possibly more just initiatives. Basing empowerment discussions in design on the capabilities approach, rather than on a traditional developmentalist or entrepreneurial discourse, can unravel how self-reliance and autonomy can be cultivated with designed products in craft production, in addition to economic gain. The cases reveal how organizational skills, management, and community entrepreneurship roles—beyond merely object creation—are crucial for sustaining empowerment projects and, when aimed toward cultivating more “fertile” ecologies of capabilities, can also support more civic qualities and equalities. In the cases described, external capabilities such as incorporating a sustained education perspective, forming cooperatives, decreasing intermediaries, fostering peer learning, and nurturing interaction between formal and informal craft and design knowledge all provided support for internal capabilities.

In further research, the value of craft could be better revealed by incorporating the feedback directly from the subjects of the empowerment process, such as the artisans and their families. Given the limitations of this study, we did not have any direct feedback from the stakeholders and thus cannot claim any consideration of their voices. However, we hope this preliminary analysis method might create a framework for future development of design methods that builds on a capabilities approach and creates more human-oriented forms of assessment, rather than merely looking at economic success, project dissemination, or discursive effects. Such changes take the work of many: The journey toward a more just craft is a long one.