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Social Systems of Flexible Production: Organizational Conditions for the Resurgence of Craft

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Abstract: Against the background of a growing interest in the resurgence of craft work, this article examines the organizational conditions that characterize craft-based production in contemporary society and how they help to facilitate craft resurgence. The paper identifies three organizational conditions of contemporary craft-based production, relating to the mass market, producing by means of flexible specialization, and using infrastructures. By applying a historical lens, I argue that these organizational conditions have formed into a particular way of organizing craft-based production which is attuned to local and temporal specificities. Therefore, this study builds on a complementary, symbiotic notion of craft which considers industrial manufacture, serial production and digital technologies to be constitutive of craft making. By offering an alternative conceptual framework to grasp the resurgence of craft, this article contributes to the understanding of organizational resilience.

Keywords: craft; industrial manufacture; organizing; flexible specialization; social systems of production; infrastructure

1 Introduction

Why do some forms of production perish and others survive? In the case of craft production, which has recently been attracting increasing interest, scholarship has provided a variety of explanations. These explanations can be framed in terms of three perspectives. One views craft resurgence as a reaction to industrialization, globalization and technology's increasing permeation of society (Becker 1978; Crawford 1997; Crook 2009; Morris 2010 [1888]; Ruskin 2010 [1851–53]). Another focuses on craft workers and emphasizes their self-awareness, self-control, and

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engagement of the human body and senses (Bell and Vachhani 2020; Crawford 2009; Endrissat and Noppeney 2019; Langlands 2019; Sennett 2009). Yet others describe the craft resurgence as a form of consumption, zooming in on themes such as authenticity, originality and valuation as part of craft work (Beverland 2005; Boltanski and Esquerre 2020; Campbell 2005; Miège 2012; Wherry 2008; Zukin 2008). Although these explanations have provided us with valuable knowledge, little attention has been paid to organizational conditions of craft-based production that are historically formed and continue to exist. Overall, this research has been silent regarding processes and products of industrial manufacture as constitutive of craft and rather have promoted a dichotomic view of the craft–industry relation.

Based on Adamson's observation that '[t]he stark dichotomies suggested by the pairing craft/industry no longer hold' (Adamson 2013: xv), this article examines the organizational conditions that characterize craft-based production in contemporary society and how they contribute to facilitating craft resurgence. It is argued that craft-based production has adjusted by making use of industrial manufacture in various ways. The notion of craft used here contests the opposition of industry and craft (Bell et al. 2019; Bell, Dacin, and Toraldo 2021; Kroezen et al. 2021) and instead emphasises the complementarity and symbiotic nature of manufacture (see, for example, Adamson 2013; Bittner and Padt 2017; Shales 2017; Zeitlin 2009).

This article takes the industry–craft distinction as a starting point to understand how the two arguably different ways of production are integrated into an updated way of organizing contemporary craft-based production. Early examples of blending boundaries include artisans in the putting-out system in a merchant-based network or individual craftspersons involved in production in industrial districts (Aage and Belussi 2008; De Propris and Lazzeretti 2007; Zeitlin 2009).[1] Other studies have revealed how original crafts have not only outlived industrial change but were able to benefit from social systems of production (Hollingsworth and Boyer 1997) and its flexible specialization (Hirst and Zeitlin 1997; Piore and Sabel 1984; Sabel and Zeitlin 2002). Examples include silk weaving in Lyon (Cotterau 2002; Poni 2002), the cutlery industry in Sohlingen and Sheffield (Boch 2002), mechanical watchmaking in Switzerland (Glasmeier 1991; Raffaelli 2019; Veyrassat 2002), jewellery from Birmingham (Carnevali 2003), and lacemaking (Makovicky 2020).

This article identifies three organizational conditions of craft-based production that have contributed to the survival of craft in contemporary society and facilitated its resilience and resurgence: relating to the mass market, producing by means of

1 There is a similarity between craft and creative production. Both areas value and profit from the social and geographical proximity of collaborators. See, for instance, Clegg and Burdon (2021) on the creation of a television series, Mora on fashion design (2006), or Cattani and Ferriani (2008) on the film industry.

flexible specialization, and using infrastructures. By emphasizing organizational conditions, this article introduces an analytical framework of craft organization – by which I mean the social systems of flexible production of craft – and applies a production lens to discover and describe the latest revival of craft. In doing so, this paper recasts the debate on the organizational conditions of production from a sociological perspective.

The contribution to the existing literature is threefold. First, this article expands our current understanding of the organization of craft-based production in contemporary society (Bell, Dacin, and Toraldo 2021; Kroezen et al. 2021). To my knowledge, little attention has been paid to the organizational conditions – as opposed to the economic, social, or cultural conditions – of craft resurgence. Second, the paper contributes to historical analyses in organization studies (Bucheli and Wadhwani 2013; Harvey and Maclean 2023; Maclean et al. 2016). It highlights the historical origins of the organizational conditions of craft making and organizational resilience, and illuminates how 'history matters' (Jones and Zeitlin 2013: 2). Third, this paper speaks to ongoing debates in the sociology of systems of production (Hollingsworth and Boyer 1997; Piore and Sabel 1984). By acknowledging the importance of technologies and digitalization for craft-based production, this paper renews and updates attention to craft as a context in which to study the organization of social systems of production.

The article is structured as follows. First, I review current streams of organizational craft research to account for the phenomenon's history and complexity, and combine single perspectives into an integrative notion of craft. Second, I explore three organizational conditions of craft-based making in contemporary society and discuss how they shape the latest craft resurgence. Finally, I conclude with potential implications for future research and practice.

2 A Review of Craft Resurgence: Making, Maker and the Object

Although recent studies constitute exceptional groundwork on which obtain new insights, these conceptualizations suffer from a lack of theoretical synthesization to explain craft-based production, its resilience and resurgence. The literature review aims to derive a fuller understanding of craft and craft resurgence by integrating three conceptualizations within the study of craft (see also Dacin, Dacin, and Kent 2019), each revealing an individual focus: the first conceptualization focuses mainly on making as an antidote to industrialization, globalization, and technology's increasing permeation in society. The second emphasises the human maker,

including the pursuit of self-awareness, self-control and sensorial experience. The third centres around the craft object as an object of consumption, including notions such as authenticity, originality, re-enchantment, valuation and re-consecration.

2.1 Craft Resurgence as an Antidote to Industrialization, Globalization and Increased Permeation of Technology in Society

This perspective shows how the workshops, communities and social networks of craft-based making and occupations have been called into question by the methods and representatives of industrial production. Retrospectively, the first 'wave'[2] of craft revival dates to the end of the nineteenth century and has roots in social and political changes. With an anti-capitalistic and counter-industrial ethos, the Arts and Crafts movement celebrated handicrafts and artisanal beauty (Becker 1978; Crawford 1997; Crook 2009). It stood against the alienated, lowbrow manufacture of the emergent industrialization, automatization, and division of labour. The first craft wave opposed industrial manufacture in that it increased self-awareness and self-fulfilment by means of creation, learning from others and accomplishing objects in their entirety (Fox Miller 2017: 2–3). The movement criticized mainly the 'constructed' value and quality of standardized products, the material processing and aesthetics which were deemed to be reactionary and ugly (Morris 2010 [1888]; Reckwitz 2017: 93–94; Ruskin 2010 [1851–53]). Later, it became oriented towards socialistic ideals such as integrated workflows, less division of labour, and meaningful work, and resisted tendencies towards alienation and deracination (Krugh 2014: 283–288). Craft became a source of self-fulfilment.

The second 'wave' originated in the 1960s and 1970s. Crafts were considered a 'hippie and yippie search for authenticity' that fostered engagement in 'the idea of handicraft as an individualistic ritual of soul-centring' (Shales 2017: 52). At that time, crafts counted as an especially pleasurable and fruitful occupation (Luckman 2012), serving as a quest for meaning and became the foundation of delight, dedication, and amusement. In its anti-capitalistic aspect, this wave stood out by questioning the prevailing political agenda and economic principles. Craft was slowly becoming an antidote to capitalistic ideals and industrial processes.

2 The notion of 'craft wave' refers to the empirical observation of post-industrial periods of craft revival, forming a wave-like pattern. Because craft-based production is considered the dominant production logic in pre-industiral times, the waves are described as occurring after the advent of industrialization. According to this notion, crafts neither clung to survival, nor experienced substitution. Hence, we prefer to talk of the resurrection, resurgence, and revival of craft.

In the twenty-first century, globalization (fragmentation of chains of production and consumption), rationalization (commercialization and critique of capitalism), and digitalization propelled a third upsurge. In the aftermath of Fordism, this 'wave' brought to the fore aesthetic aspects and symbolic values (Fox Miller 2017). Based on technological innovations, as well as social traditions, it was 'fuelled by an intriguing alliance of the oldest and newest of social technologies, the sewing circle and the blog' (Adamson 2010: 586). Craftspersonship is turned into a 'democratic eruption of creativity' that has the power to threaten cultural canons and institutions (Shales 2017: 24). Craft, it seemed, managed to create contacts between rational concepts of progress and human notions of workpersonship.

From such a perspective, political dissatisfaction and critiques of the economic rationale make a re-emergence – or the next 'wave' – more likely. Given the preconditions of alienation, automatization, and division of labour, this perspective revolves around the possibilities of meaningful and pleasurable making. While waves ebb and flow, so do the motives creating 'waves'. Hence, old themes and motivations remain, continue, and co-exist, while new 'waves' bring new interests and emphases. Treating craft resurgence as an irregular but recurring phenomenon, conceptualizations with a focus on making stress societal, cultural, and political themes, although such conceptualizations remain relatively silent about the organizing principles that fuel its resurgence.

2.2 Craft Resurgences with a Human-Centred Focus: Awareness, Control, and the Senses

Some research indicates that craft 'has been accused of being anti-modern, nostalgic, and anachronistic' (Zukin 2008: 296), and is perceived as a 'conduit back to how it was' (Holt and Yamauchi 2019: 38), or that 'present-day advocates of craftwork have tended to be labelled romantics, uneasy with the modern world and either yearning for a return to an earlier preindustrial age or nurturing unrealistic dreams of future post-industrial utopias' (Campbell 2005: 25). Whereas before the Industrial Revolution craft and hand-made economies were not a 'separate field of endeavor' (Adamson 2013: xvi), the 'new' crafts come 'with a new energy and "attitude" and political agenda, including feminism, alternative modes of production, consumption and exchange' (Endrissat and Noppeney 2019: 102f.).

This perspective promotes the focus on individual pleasure and devotion, manual engrossment, occupational practices, (self-)exploitation, and gender (Hughes 2013; Luckman 2015). However, these works do not explicitly address questions of organizing. Digitalization of craft work has just recently started to gain scholarly attention (Bertoni 2021; Krugh 2014; Luckman 2013). This camp is known for its

critical examination of new technologies transforming craft work practices and manufacturing processes because it is held to conflict with manual performance and embodiment of skill. However, by problematizing the influence of digital transformation, this perspective falls short of broaching digitalization as an advantage to crafts, crafters and crafting alike (Adamson 2010: 585–6).

With the increasing rationalization of everyday life, this viewpoint conceptualizes human engagement, authority and control of work processes, as well as self-awareness, self-control and self-realization through handicrafts. It 'fetishizes the material, the tactile, the analogue' (Luckman 2013: 251). With the focus on the human, '[t]he resurgence of manual work and do-it-yourself craftmanship [sic!] is seen as an opportunity to restore individual agency, autonomy, purpose, and meaning in work, as well as the need to be part of a community – often absent in conventional workplaces of the knowledge economy' (Endrissat and Noppeney 2019: 98). Here, the 'head and hand'-relation (Sennett 2009), or 'hand-eye co-ordination' (Langlands 2019: 338) relation emphasize the contact between body and material (Bell and Vachhani 2020; Bell et al. 2019; Risatti 2007), which stands in stark contrast to industrial production. Personal fulfilment comes with doing 'a job well for its own sake' (Sennett 2009: 9), when one throws 'his [sic!] body into his labour' (Shales 2017: 74), using all the senses (Abbots 2018: 111). Forming materials into an object by hand, the respective 'thingness' and its imperfections mirror the process, practices, and patience of the interaction of human body and material (Risatti 2007).

Finally, such a conceptualization of craft focuses on the connection of body, spirit, and object to explain the aversion to industrial production. This perspective revolves around humanization, personal experience, and ethical considerations. It contends that, based on self-control, self-realization, and self-awareness, craft resurgence is the result of a change in the value and meaning of work (Crawford 2009; Gandini and Gerosa 2023). Thereby, other 'old' jobs – in other words, traditionally low-status manual labour occupations (for example, bartending, butchering, or barbering, see Ocejo 2017) – have gained new impetus. This development has resulted in the coinage of the term 'neo-craft' (Gandini and Gerosa 2023; Land 2018). From this perspective, the resurgence of craft is a cultural, empowering phenomenon with a focus on the organization of labour and the welfare of the worker, without further discussion of the organizational constitution and conditions of the production process itself.

2.3 Craft Resurgence as a Form of Consumption: Authenticity, Originality and Valuation

This perspective views crafts as a discourse that humanizes social relations, and infuses objects with authenticity, originality and genuineness to increase value,

while the role of industrial manufacture in craft-based production is downplayed. This stream has started to investigate how craft is employed to communicate and convey authenticity (Beverland 2005; Carroll and Wheaton 2009; Krugh 2014; Luckman 2015). Such an 'authentic' image of craft contrasts sharply with industrial manufacture, confers an 'aura' (Holt and Yamauchi 2019: 34; Luckman 2013: 254; Wherry 2008: 147), re-enchants (Hartmann and Östberg 2013; Suddaby, Ganzin, and Minkus 2017) and presents the object as 'sacred' (Wherry 2008: 123). Strikingly, mass-production tries but fails to narrate aspects of cultural legacy in comparable ways and thus is not considered equally authentic. According to Krugh (2014: 293),

> [c]raft fits with these [contemporary] movements because of its focus on consumption and production. Since the Arts and Crafts movement, craft has been linked – socially and politically – with unalienated personal labour, *in contrast to impersonal industrial mass production.* Since the appeal of craft comes from the focus on the individual labour involved in creation, craft is about the personality of the maker. [Emphasis added]

Instead of mass-produced commodities, craft consumers value originality, naturalness and genuineness as central criteria, which are conveyed by cultural embeddedness and geographical provenance (Boltanski and Esquerre 2020; Cruz, Beck and Wezel 2018; Leslie and Reimer 2006; Wherry 2008). Craft consumption reveals being-in-the-know, conveys status and signals social and cultural capital and therefore becomes a means of self-expression and social distinction (Beverland 2005; Boltanski and Esquerre 2020; Campbell 2005; Miège 2012; Zukin 2008). For example, showcasing artisanal production in local workshops allows visitors to experience and witness on-the-spot manufacture, charges the product with emotional sentiment and propels stories of symbolic value (Wherry 2008: 121; 147). In this moment of human–object interaction an aura is created that is particular to craft-based making, an instance which industrial manufacture cannot imitate in similar fashion. Regarding value infusion, Boltanski and Esquerre speak of 'enrichment' (2020).

To sum up, this view illuminates how craft objects are imbued with cultural, economic and symbolic values, and are thus able to confer status on the user. Hence, this perspective revolves around the notions of authenticity, valuation and re-enchantment, all feeding into a specific form (and object) of consumption. It describes how re-enchantment, re-consecration and enrichment work and thereby counteract industrial making by imbuing craft objects with value. According to this, the resurgence of craft is an economic, value-based phenomenon, and craft consumption is based on its price, accessibility and know-how, and displays the status and wealth of its clientele (Miège 2012: 15). Moreover, such conceptualizations embrace the emancipation from capitalistic economies, fulfilling personal or communal dedication, and feed into a reverse attitude to production or alternative sources of expertise. However, in contrast to the descriptions given above, this view

can explain cultural consumption as reserved for the wealthy and affluent, but has less to say about its production, which also penetrates low-status communities. Consequently, it has little to say about the organizational constitution of craft-based production.

3. Applying a Historical Lens to the Organization of Craft-Based Production

The foregoing review set out to illustrate the ways in which scholars and practitioners have dealt with the resurgence of craft. However, it underestimates the organizational conditions under which these resurgences are facilitated. Beyond nostalgia or retrophilia, history is relevant to understanding the organizational conditions of craft-based making and how this contributes to explaining its current resurgence. Applying a historical organizational lens (Bucheli and Wadhwani 2013; Harvey and Maclean 2023; Maclean et al. 2021; Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg 2016; Suddaby, Foster, and Mills 2013) to uncover the organizing principles of the latest craft resurgence is valuable because it allows us to (a) embed 'a contemporary issue of substance and import' in the context of relevant literature, (b) critically engage with and explain 'the form and origins of [a] significant contemporary phenomen [on]', and (c) meaningfully contribute to the theoretical conversation around it (Harvey and Maclean 2023: 19ff.). Such an approach is especially fruitful when looking at production economies:

> By expanding our understanding of the range of organizational and productive forms in the past, and enriching our understanding of the reasons for and outcomes of earlier decisions about economic governance, the historical alternatives approach can sharpen awareness and improve the quality of public debate about the range of strategic choices open to us in the present and future. (Zeitlin 2009: 135)

According to Stinchcombe (1965), organizations and trades mirror the social structure and are characterized by the founding conditions of their time of establishment. Each society has brought about its typical forms of organization and distinct underlying structures (Stinchcombe 1965: 449). Thus, also craft trades and organizations have carried their 'institutional imprinting' as part of their historical situatedness, before but also after industrialization. The study of the resurgence of craft offers an attempt to analyse how new forms of organizing craft-based production are adjusted and sometimes even break with old imprintings. In the realm of craft, Shales has observed that 'new modes of manufacture will continue to be invented and new understandings of old tools will continue to challenge our grasp of the past' (2017: 30). Thus, a historical perspective helps to revise the pre-industrial organizational

conditions of craft and to reveal 'a new model more attuned to local specificities' (Maclean et al. 2021: 15) and current characteristics. According to Kroezen and Heugens (2019: 976), history plays an important role in the resurgence of craft because 'remnants of traditional craft often needed to be blended with contemporaneous elements from modern industrialism, as well as foreign representations of craft, to facilitate reemergence'. Similarly, I use historical concepts to explain the form and origins of currents (Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg 2016: 621); that is, why craft has revived and how this came about from an organizational perspective. There is a difference between how craft manufacture is organized today and how it was organized back then – that is, in various periods in various ways (cf. Stinchcombe 1965). However, such historical imprinting results from the social construction of a specific time and, accordingly, encompasses particular social demands, perceptions and imaginaries. It thus entails how these businesses will cope with current and future challenges. The organizational conditions discussed here must be considered temporary emphases while other characteristics, for instance a focus on the handmade, solitary making or anti-capitalistic motifs, are not emphasized equally (Maclean et al. 2021: 6).

4. Three Conditions of the Social Systems of Flexible Craft Production

After the Industrial Revolution and, later, with the dawn of digitalization, some craft sectors have faced crucial changes. New technologies of financing (for example, crowdfunding), sourcing and legwork (such as crowdsourcing), but also new possibilities of distribution, marketing and sales (such as web shops or platform-based, online marketplaces) have had an impact on how craft-based production can or needs to be organized. Such craft-related services are fundamentally grounded in the spread and use of digital technologies and the distribution of knowledge and therefore, as signs of the times, equip craftspersons and their enterprises with new opportunities. Historically, these services were witnessed as emerging as a by-product of industrial districts (De Propris and Lazzeretti 2007) documented under the label of external, subsidiary economies (Marshall 1923). According to Shales, 'seemingly disruptive technologies actually generated new types of crafts-people' (Shales 2017: 25) – and new forms of organizing craft-based production. I will now zoom in on three organizational conditions of craft-based production. These three conditions relate to the review by (1) problematizing the ambivalent relation of craft to industrial manufacture and the mass market, (2) responding to the dynamic of globalization by supporting flexible but specialized production and keeping local skill

and knowhow, and (3) reacting to the increasing permeation of technology in society, which leads us to show why, and how, craft makes use of infrastructures.

4.1 Relating to the Mass Market

The notion of interrelations between craft and industry becomes evident when we look at how craft organizations restructure established (mass) markets. In the shadow of standardized products of the mass market, craft organizations create and inhabit niches which are not subject to open market competition (Aage and Belussi 2008; Anand and Peterson 2000; Anderson 2011; Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). Instead, these niches, accommodating dozens of usually independent craft ateliers, tolerate alternative production models, small-scale or single-unit production and local economies (Allemann 2016; Carnevali 2003; Kroezen and Heugens 2019; Nyfeler 2019; Ott 2019). Often, these niches contain high-end commodities (Porac, Thomas and Baden-Fuller 1989), unique and very sophisticated products (Karpik 2010; Powell 1983), or unconventional tastes (Anderson 2011). Thus, established market structures function as a background to which craft can relate by distinguishing and differentiating itself from the mass, an aspect that has fostered its resurgence.

To illustrate the relation between craft-based production and mass market, Carroll and Swaminathan draw on craft-based beer production to show that the emergence of niches 'corresponds to the presumed opening of peripheral product space created by consolidation among large generalist breweries' (Carroll and Swaminathan 2002: 725). The rise of specialist firms involves the resource space that lies outside the generalist target areas. Large generalists do not fit in niches because of size (they are too big) and scope (they cater to diverse interests) and even smaller generalists cannot reach the periphery: 'And because resources tend to be thin in these regions, the specialists located here also tend to be small. Small, highly specialized locations are also less likely to be invaded by the ever-encroaching generalists than are broader locations and they tend to be more defensible if they are' (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000: 720). In such markets, specialists and generalists do not compete for the same resources because they depend on different parts of the resource base (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000: 720; McKendrick and Hannan 2013; Powell 1983: 61). This also accounts for the craft–mass market relation, in which most craft-based producers rely on another resource base as mass producers.

Kroezen and Heugens (2019) provide another example of how craft-based making can create a niche in an existing mass market by blending craft tradition with industrial advantages. Their study sheds light on how 'remnants of traditional craft often needed to be blended with contemporaneous elements from modern industrialism, as well as foreign representations of craft, to facilitate re-emergence'

(Kroezen and Heugens 2019: 976) in the Dutch craft-beer industry, thereby creating a new market segment. In close detail, they show how ideational and material components of the 'old' craft logic (such as names, logos and buildings) are combined with a more recent industrial logic (for example, new knowledge, technical processes or approaches to marketization and sales) to form a 'new' variety of branches, niches and competencies that bring to the fore underlying infrastructural elements (such as platforms), dormant social networks (for example, traditional brewer community) and communication as a central means to reactivate old forms of crafting. Nevertheless if this new craft beer market draws on historical elements (Lamertz et al. 2016) or applies non-craft elements, such distinctions are exploited to contrast craft-based beer brewing with its industrial counterpart.

To take another example, Raffaelli (2019) illustrates how the re-emergence of the legacy technology of mechanical watchmaking in Switzerland is opposed to mass manufacturing methods. He carves out the formation of a new market segment through the revival of mechanic technologies:

> Craftsmanship distinguished mechanical watchmaking from the mass manufacturing processes associated with quartz technology production. Mechanical watchmakers capitalized on this novel distinction; claims of craftsmanship aimed to shift the notion of the mechanical watch away from being merely a commodity good and toward 'art'. (2019: 587)

Utilizing mass production and industrially fabricated components can also be beneficial when used for productive reasons in an established market. For example, Poni (2002) demonstrates how Lyon silk makers profited from the implementation of seasonal patterns, sales of sample cloths, wholesale practices, the distinction between fashion and luxury products and technological transformations (for example, perforated cards or the automatic Jacquard loom). The implementation of innovative methods and the 'dominance of software over hardware' (Poni 2002: 74) rewarded the sector with long-lasting success over other textile sectors and international competitors.

Another case in point is the American garment industry (Doeringer and Crean 2006; Uzzi 1996). Prior to the Second World War, garments were 'quickly and flexibly produced by craft shops and by relatively small manufacturers and contracts, following a seasonal product cycle' (Doeringer and Crean 2006: 360). The post-war period saw the replacement of the former local industry. The extremely specialized and effective progressive bundle system took over:

> It is based on such extreme specialization and division of labour that any single task takes only seconds to perform and the total labour content of a garment is measured in minutes. However, so many tasks are needed to assemble parts into complete garments and it is so difficult to balance workflow along the assembly line, that production is slow and inflexible. (Doeringer and Crean 2006: 359)

The trade-off between flexibility and speed, adaptability and quantity required manufacturers to develop fashion styles far in advance and required retailers to place orders long before the start of the season, which eventually led to a lock-in (Doeringer and Crean 2006: 359, 361). Next, 'just-in-time production' transformed the industry, producing semi-finished, 'grey' garments which only require minor alterations 'so that prints and colours can be changed shortly before new products are shipped' and reduced lead times again (Ibid.: 370). Finally, the revival of the small and medium sized manufacturers of the New York fashion sector resulted from pre-productive design and post-productive marketing (Ibid.: 363–365). Small manufacturers exploited resources more profitably and efficiently than large industrial competitors, which led to the creation of two new niches: one for high quality, high-end fashion and custom-made clothing of 'exotic technical fabrics that require considerable care and skill in manufacturing' (Ibid.: 365), and another covering the demand for, for example, surgical garments, uniforms, emergency orders repair work, or reworking of unsold products (Ibid.: 365). The first niche in particular revived direct collaboration among designers, producers and retailers, like the network activities of the pre-industrial workshop. It is also characterised by a rapid response to constantly changing fashions with a high degree of skill. The second type was a response to the inability of the mass market to provide uniform and emergency orders for basic products and, complementarily, is able to react with a speed that large suppliers cannot achieve. Consequently, the small fashion companies have been able to exploit the advantage of the niche, namely, to diversify peripheral territories that are unattainable to established market competitors. Despite their limited size, the economic benefits are remarkable: proximity of production facilities, rapid response times and short communication channels. Hence, small manufacturers became important cooperation partners for big industry firms. Whereas craft-based production managed to withstand the environmental dynamics of rationalization, standardization and capitalization, resilience was largely based on the utilization of social network contacts and technologies (Nyfeler 2019; Uzzi 1996).

4.2 Producing by Means of Flexible Specialization

With the rise of automation at the end of the nineteenth century, craft-based labour lost its significance (Boch 2002; Crane 2012; Piore and Sabel 1984; Veyrassat 2002). The concept of flexible specialization, however, can be used to explain why craft-based making as a flexible production system has proven to be resilient, despite economic challenges and social changes. Flexible specialization has also affected the resurgence of craft in current society. By considering 'the sustaining environment of the virtual' (Adamson 2010: 586) of contemporary society, the concept has been updated

while also bringing to the fore 'hybrid forms of productive organization between mass production and flexible specialization which can be more or less easily reconstructed and recombined in response to changing background interests' (Zeitlin 2009: 124).

Piore and Sabel (1984) identify two principles that made craft organization flexible and fit for environmental dynamics. Craft enterprises adapt and specialize their structures and resources. Structures helps to organize, for instance, production and storage facilities, but also infrastructures of pre-production, such as sourcing or supplier networks, or post-production, including the social systems of marketing, sales and distribution. Resources also matter in the form of financial capital, knowhow and skill, as well as access to relevant infrastructures. I develop this idea with a focus on technology and innovation, arguing that flexible specialization should be considered an important organizational condition to understand the resurgence of crafts. In this view, flexibility includes not only structural or technological adaptability, but also involves skilled labour with the capability to shift jobs, repair or modify technological equipment according to social changes (for example, demand, standards or policies).

In general, organizations adapt their structures because of changes in their environment, such as digitalization, automatization and mass-production, globalization, commodification and competition. Moreover, organizations specialize not only to differentiate themselves from competitors, but also to smooth out manufacture processes. Specifically, due to the use of flexible machines, general-purpose equipment[3] and skilled workers, craft-based production can quickly adapt to changing interests, new demands and rising innovations. The argument here contrasts craft production with a Tayloristic logic, in which individual parts are exchanged to maintain speed of production. Under flexible specialization, trained personnel have a holistic knowledge of machines and their spare parts, which allows them to repair broken components or adjust relevant parts in time – and according to nascent trends in the environment that require changes of production (Piore and Sabel 1984: 207). Craft-based production, as a 'light, labor-intense' industry (Zeitlin 2009: 130) depends highly on skilled labour, that is 'flexible technology and speciality manufacture' (ibid.: 122), and is apt to bring about 'a wide and constantly changing assortment of goods for large but constantly shifting markets' (Piore and Sabel 1984: 5). Such flexibility further allows craft enterprises to rearrange single components and to constantly reshape production processes, which is salient for organizations in

3 It is interesting to note that machinery required for mass and industrial production seldom is mass-produced. Rather, it is itself the product of accurate manual labour executed by specialists (Piore and Sabel 1984: 26–28).

dynamic markets, yet also limits the capacity for new arrangements and redeployment (ibid. 1984: 269). This 'capacity to adjust the volume and/or composition of output flexibly and introduce new products rapidly in response to shifting demands and business strategy' is typical of 'economies of variety' (Zeitlin 2009: 122). Also, because of this, 'craft producers have been able to extend their production volume without sacrificing their high quality standards and customization' (Hollingsworth and Boyer 1997: 22). Moreover, specialization, decentralization and diversification (Behagg 1998; Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; McKendrick and Hannan 2013; Poni 2002) influence adaptability, innovativeness or artisanal reinvention (Blundel and Smith 2013) and are related to flexibility and velocity (Doeringer and Crean 2006). On this basis, craft-based production enables differentiation, as well as product and taste diversity (Boch 2002; Cotterau 2002, Powell 1983). Usually, 'firms with a high degree of flexible specialization tend to be small artisanal firms located in modest-size regions [and] engage in diversified low-volume production and emphasize economies of scope' (Hollingsworth and Boyer 1997: 28). Organizations with a structure that meets these characteristics can compensate for lack of access to resources. An indicative example of this is the Birmingham gun-manufacturing industry. It illustrates how workshops – meaning local, social networks of crafters and small businessmen – developed into a sophisticated supplier and subcontracting system that could react to short-notice dynamics (for example, growing demand in the event of war), while still providing quality due to the elasticity of small-scale production (Behagg 1998). The restructuration of the former workshops into an innovative organization realigned 'the relationship between the small businessman and the craft-producer' (Behagg 1998: 5). The new version of what constituted the former workshop now covers a variety of geographically involved and dispersed but socially proximate net of actors. According to this, craft-based production relies essentially on (semi-)automation, teamwork and a complex system of divided labour to produce highly refined artefacts (Shales 2017: 76). Shales calls this 'collated craftmanship':

> Instead of using the phrase 'assembly line,' which implies a routine, predictable sequence, we might do better to describe this layering of expertise as collated craftmanship. Multihanded-craft generates meaningfulness more readily than a single artist working alone. (2017: 77)

Despite the concept's applicability, Piore and Sabel concentrate on production, that is, the actual manufacture of a product, and thereby overlook service and semi-finished components, which are essential for production. Hollingsworth and Boyer's (1997) idea of 'social systems of production' refers to institutional arrangements, in which 'actors are loosely joined to each other in long-term relationships that ensure their capacity to cooperate and collaborate with each other through repeated exchanges' (ibid.: 8). They emphasize various forms of embeddedness into a variety

of regional, subnational, national and global forms of trade. It is argued here that organizing crafts in contemporary society profits from pre- and post-production processes that also include working in cooperation with industry and service providers and considers various stages of final assembly and customer communication. Accordingly, (semi-)automated processes and semi-finished components receive not only practical attention, but recognize industrial manufacture and service providers as essential parts of organizing craft-based production. By considering pre- and post-production, the notion of 'flexible social systems of production' (Hollingsworth and Boyer 1997: 28) includes craft-related services that play a crucial role before and after the 'actual' making.

4.3 Using Infrastructures

Infrastructures are central to understanding the current revival of craft-based production, but they also have been important historically. One historical example is the Birmingham Jewellery quarter (De Propris and Lazzeretti 2007) in which different but collaborating actors set up a production-related infrastructure that enabled them to produce and trade nationally and internationally. The infrastructure of the industrial district was characterized by proximity, specialization and a production system, including external, subsidiary economies which emerged out of the way production was organized across firms (De Propris and Lazzeretti 2007; Marshall 1923). Thus, infrastructures comprise manufacturing facilities and technologies, the social infrastructure of the supplier or service network of all production phases, including pre- and postproduction, and cultural-social infrastructures, such as skills and knowhow of the 'intangible cultural heritage' of craft (Nyfeler 2019). Because they are accessible and shareable, they play a crucial role in the resurgence of craft-based production.

Organizationally, several infrastructures play an important role for craft-based production. Aspers and Darr (2022) have analysed the social infrastructure of the online marketplace ETSY from an economic sociology perspective to understand how work and trade are enabled by institutions, conditions, forms, and hierarchical and horizontal ties between actors. Moreover, infrastructures are considered important because they not only include manufacturing techniques and technologies, or function as 'traceability infrastructure' (Power 2019), but also represent a materialization of relations (Parker 2023). Power describes infrastructures as sitting 'uneasily between field level, institutionalist and practice-specific, materialist conceptualizations of it' (2015: 45). Similarly, Parker adds a mediating layer to it, emphasizing the mutual constituence of 'people and things' and how new options emerge at the crossroads of channels and actions, 'recognising that non-human materials such as buildings and

computer systems shape the social and vice versa. Infra is that which is "below", unseen and assumed. Social and organizational practice are channelled by existing patterns of infrastructure, and the channels that already exist shape the actions that are likely, and sometimes even possible' (Parker 2023: 18). This cross-level conceptualization of production- and communication-related, underlying socio-technological structures that come into being while practices and structures are interacting and equally supporting each other, makes infrastructures a valuable notion for organizational craft research. By means of infrastructures, organizations can access, source, trace, administer, maintain and utilize relevant information (Power 2015, 2019). Thus, infrastructures contribute significantly to the prosperity and popularity of craft-based production because they foster communicative, informative and resource independence, facilitate unrestricted exchange of knowledge, and promote digital, democratic participation (Holt and Wiedner 2023: 17–18). In particular, the increase in digitally accessible and manageable infrastructures of pre- and post-production has dramatically changed the organizational conditions of craft-based production. Examples include the internet, digital payment methods, or the potential of craft-related service providers, such as postal services, or online marketplaces and web shops.

Although infrastructures remain invisible, or at least unobservable, they 'render visible, knowable and thinkable complex patterns of human interaction' (Bowker et al. 2019: 1). Furthermore, as much as infrastructures produce knowledge, they channel and create information (Bowker et al. 2019: 8; Power 2015: 50). One example of such organizationally specific infrastructures are business archives (for example, Raffaelli 2019; Wadhwani et al. 2018). With the growing importance of storing and making available organizational data, business archives function as a unique infrastructure resulting from the new practices of archival storage and its meaning for corporate history and legacy. Ironically, this often entails more (not less) division of labour, an unintended consequence of the widespread use of infrastructures (Krugh 2014: 294).

Furthermore, infrastructures provide an opportunity to expand social and economic reach. Micro-, small- and medium-sized, as well as young companies usually face several hindrances: first, they lack access to high quality resources (raw materials, machinery, skills and expertise); second, because they lack scale, they encounter higher production costs; and third, they rarely manage to create scope (Chandler, Jr. 1994). While technologies (for example, 3D printers, laser cutters, open-source software) enable single-unit or low-volume production, infrastructures provide organizations with benefits such as new forms of financing (such as crowdfunding), new ways of distribution (for example, online marketplaces, web shops) or

new channels of marketing and sales (such as social media, online platforms, or fairs) from which small and young firms in particular benefit. On one hand, infrastructures enable versatility, efficiency and innovation based on quantity as well as quality, while on the other hand, they facilitate supply and consumer contacts. Moreover, craft organizations use infrastructures to overcome formal disadvantages (size, age, endowments of resources) and to bridge social distances. Thus, infrastructures comprise an optimal structure by means of which organizations can directly and efficiently address users, sell, and distribute craft objects, or channel and communicate relevant information.

Studying the local production of traditional crafts, Wherry (2008) points to the social, communicative and logistic infrastructures that substantiate relations between producers, intermediary traders and consumers. He finds that the underlying structure of social networks not only contributes to local markets' global accessibility, but also affects the quality of trading relations.

> Having a mix of both arm's-length and embedded ties to outsiders offers a mixed set of distribution channels that the artisans may utilize strategically. In other words, the embedded ties that the artisans have give them a sense of stability when negotiating with arm's-length buyers. […] These embedded ties affect how businesslike the artisans may appear when negotiating with new buyers. In general, the economic effect is positive by virtue of the diversity of distribution options at the artisan's disposal. (Wherry 2008: 103)

Apparently, a diverse mixture of social infrastructures increases the likelihood of trade as much as it enhances flexibility of distribution.

From an organizational perspective, infrastructures are especially interesting to study because they mirror technological dynamics, consider the relevance of social network relations and thereby tackle the lack of interest in organizational structures of production. Not solely because of, but significantly fostered by digital transformation, new ways and possibilities of sourcing, acquisition of knowledge and skill, as well as trade, communication and distribution emerged (Luckman 2013; Shales 2017) and are becoming increasingly important (Hasse and Nyfeler 2021). By means of new technologies and infrastructures organizations can unlock unrivalled niches or distinctive products that do not circulate on the mass market, differentiate their scope in an existing market and establish remarkable visibility, not only, but also by relating to organizational history (Lamertz et al. 2016; McKendrick and Hannan 2013). Thus, organizations utilise the potential of infrastructures and establish a beneficial source of value creation.

5 Conclusions

The study of craft has gained attention and importance in organizational and economic research. It contributes to the understanding and explanation of a variety of phenomena, such as the meaning of work, artisan economies and creative and cultural industries, alternative sources of expertise, and the transformation of production and consumption. Despite the many recent contributions to understanding the organization of craft work, the issue of how craft-based production is organized and how such organizing has driven its resurgence remain underresearched. A complementary and symbiotic notion of craft considers industrial manufacture, serial production and digital technologies to be constitutive of craft making is necessary to investigate how organizational conditions characterize craft-based production and to understand not only the resilience but also the reemergence of craft.

Although we can build on a vast body of literature, we are still short of understanding how organizational conditions – including organizing all phases of production, its relation to mass production, and the mutual constituence of social and technological infrastructures – have essentially facilitated craft resilience and resurgence. By offering a close examination of organizational conditions through a historical lens, this article lays another paving stone on the road to understanding what constitutes and drives the recent craft revival. However, such an analysis can be informative about the resilience and resurgence of organizational forms beyond the context of craft. The paper shows that the latest craft resurgence is essentially facilitated by the combination of three organizational conditions that bring forth a new way of organizing craft-based production: relating to the mass market, producing by means of flexible specialization, and using infrastructures. These organizational conditions characterize, shape and enable craft-based production in contemporary society and are constitutive of its new forms of organizing, including flexible and agile structures, single-unit or small batch production, specialized techniques and versatile, reparable devices that allow for quick adjustment and multiple use. Thus, this way of organizing craft-based production has proven resilient. Traditional sectors, legacy technologies or artisanal practices for craft-based production, it is argued, are still viable due to their substantial ability to distinguish themselves from the mass market and its logic of manufacture, produce with the flexibility required to adapt to environmental dynamics while continuing with established capacities and capabilities of specialized knowhow and labour, and use infrastructures to their advantage. How organizational conditions impact the behaviour and performance of other contemporary economies has yet to be researched. The article thus joins current discussions on questions of digital transformation,

consumption patterns and consumer demands, welfare, wealth and luxury, social movements and sustainability, further education courses, the development of alternative sources of expertise and entrepreneurship, cultural consciousness, and regional competitiveness. This list of adjacent topics leaves ample room for future investigations.

Finally, the article also has practical implications. For example, in view of the displacement of craft guilds, the development towards reviving legacy techniques and putatively antiquated occupations raises questions about which crafts are resurgent and why, thus problematizing the dimension of resource allocation and distribution. Given the disappearance of guilds, it also raises questions about the governance of jurisdictions and occupational training, quality control and certification, community and membership. This paper therefore adds to and extends organizational debates on craft-based production.

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