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Making livelihoods within communities of practice

This paper will explore the form and function of craft networks in the life of a maker, addressing the intersection of making and selling within such networks. This paper interrogates the place of organised networks and communities of practice for makers as they navigate their own practice, and sell or exhibit to customers and patrons. The paper will explore the long established routes to market and support that makers throughout the 20th century received from regional craft guilds, and will consider the purpose of such organisations for contemporary makers.

The experiences of makers working within these networks will be addressed, exploring the challenges and opportunities that being part of a community of practice might afford. The chapter will address issues of innovation and stagnation within the craft sector, and explore the ways in which communities of practice may become stuck, and the situations that enable forward momentum. This discussion will explore the ways in which issues of standard, tradition and achievements of the craft community are navigated in response to changing tastes and emerging markets, and how shifts in policy, and policy enabled opportunities, subsequently shape a makers' livelihood.

Many of the regional craft guilds that emerged in the mid 20th century responded to rural industries policy initiatives to support makers routes to market and professionalisation of their business practices. The ongoing value of these professional networks for rural workers will be considered, set against the changes of connecting with consumers in a crowded and increasingly diverse market place.

Overall the paper aims to shed light on the intersection of a makers practice, their social and professional connections through organisations, their routes of market and the ways in which organisations such as Guilds continue to act as a mark of standard in the contemporary craft market pace.