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Maker Cultures

Through my presentation, I will highlight the power of the creative industries as a vehicle to bring change and build peace in a context of war or postwar using the case study of my own sustainable and ethical fashion brand, Zarif Design.

Zarif's work is based on reviving the traditional craftsmanship which represents centuries of cultural history in danger of being lost in the face of more than 30 years of civil war in Afghanistan. The revival of the traditional skills and arts provides the makers and the people a sense of identity, of pride and confidence from which they can build a future. The aim of Zarif Design is to rebuild and create community through developing a making culture.

There is a tremendous potential for intersecting new creative designs with these time-honored arts to satisfy contemporary style. While promoting cultural preservation, this work provides a platform where traditional high quality craft becomes a source of economic development.

Through the creative industry, Zarif manages to bring women and men to work together after several years where women were denied their basic rights and genders were segregated. This creative environment also helps to bypass the conflict sometimes caused by ethnic differences in the country – a fragmentation created by these years of war.

The impact of this work transcends business and money. It's about the empowerment of the people, creating understanding, trust and tolerance for each other and other cultures. These are foundations for building and strengthening communities and increasing our social resilience. Creativity is a tool to bring the positive aspect of the human spirit, its resilience in the face of war and terror, its beauty despite the destruction, the hope in the face of fear and a future for a country that deserves!

One of the biggest challenges continues to be securing sales and production. The purpose of this project is to find opportunities where I can connect people and empower not only the artisans in Afghanistan, but also the designers and buyers in the West to cultivate a culture of giving back.

The Silk Road was once a strong connection between East and West founded on the trading of goods such as spices, silk and colors. This fostered a cultural exchange that brought the world closer together. Today we need to revitalize this connection, not only for the exchange of natural resources but to breathe new life into a cultural exchange that has been largely lost. Reviving this exchange will foster more understanding that goes beyond our differences.

If harmonious integration and thoughtful design fosters compassion, community, and tolerance of others, then it is a challenge worth pursuing.