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AUTHENTICITY AS WEAVING COHERENCE ACROSS TIME AND PLACE: INSIGHTS FROM CRAFT

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the topic of authenticity work in the development of sustainable business models, referring to craft practices. The debate on authenticity in management and organization studies focuses on authenticity mainly in relation to an audience for competitive advantage, but this reflects a static and functionalist view of authenticity, failing to consider authenticity as exerted by organizations and individuals in the continuous becoming of their work. Using the metaphor of "weaving coherence," the chapter identifies six modes of authenticity work in craft, showing how craftmakers integrate past, present, future, and place into their practices and how this contributes to the development of sustainable business models. This shift in perspective moves the discussion from audience-based narratives to a producer-focused, practice-oriented view, positioning authenticity as an ongoing process. By highlighting the time- and place-based nature of craft, the chapter contributes to the understanding of authenticity as a living practice contributing to business models' sustainability.

The chapter invites further research into the intersection of authenticity, craft, and sustainability, extending its relevance to organizational studies and to practice.

Keywords: Authenticity; authenticity work; craft; coherence; time; place; sustainable business models

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of authenticity has gained increasing attention across multiple disciplines, from management and organization studies to tourism, cultural and creative industries (Beverland, 2005; Ganzin et al., 2024; Gerosa, 2024; Rickly, 2022). In a world marked by skepticism toward traditional ideologies of progress, rationality, and capitalism, the search for authenticity – whether in personal identities, organizational practices, or consumer experiences – has become an essential concern. As individuals and organizations strive to express genuine, original, and sincere selves, the quest for authenticity is no longer a peripheral interest but a central pursuit in contemporary society. Moreover, recent scholarship in management, geography, and tourism has highlighted how authenticity can serve as a strategic asset for sustainability (Erhardt et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2018; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020). Despite its widespread use, the concept of "authenticity" remains ambiguous and elusive across different streams of literature, making its potential impact on business, particularly as a driver of sustainability, difficult to fully grasp. To overcome this, we propose shifting the focus toward a largely overlooked dimension of authenticity: how it is practiced by organizational actors in their everyday work, rather than how it is externally claimed or perceived by audiences. This practice-based perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how authenticity work can contribute to achieving sustainability goals and building sustainable business models, a connection acknowledged in the literature, yet still underexplored. Accordingly, we ask: *How does authenticity work unfold in day-to-day practice, and in what ways does it support the development of sustainable business models?*

This chapter thus explores the notion of "authenticity work" within the context of craft. We propose that craft, as a peculiar form of production, offers a unique lens through which to examine authenticity in its making and in its impact on sustainability, focusing on the practical, producer-related side rather than the audience-related narratives of authenticity. Through an exploration of the time- and place-based nature of craft, and an examination

of the intersection of time, place, and the act of making, we note how craft work involves a continuous process of construction of coherence across time and place. We call this *weaving coherence* and conceive it as the very essence of authentic work.

Through proposing authenticity as weaving coherence, this chapter aims to make a contribution to both the study of authenticity, shifting the focus toward its embodied, lived dimensions, and the understanding of craft as a meaningful and evolving form of production, offering valuable new perspectives for research on sustainable business models.

AUTHENTICITY IN MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

In today's postmodern world, marked by declining trust in progress, rationality, and capitalism, the search for authenticity has become a central concern for individuals, organizations, and society. People seek authentic places, organizations value employees who appear true to themselves, and audiences desire authentic experiences, including in tourism. While commonly associated with traits like truthfulness, sincerity, and tradition (Lehman et al., 2019), the meaning of authenticity remains ambiguous.

Lehman and colleagues' (2019) literature review represents a significant effort to organize the complexity surrounding this construct. It shows that authenticity always involves the relationship between an entity and a specific referent: (1) the alignment between an entity's internal values and its external expressions; (2) the conformity of an entity to the norms of its social category; and (3) the connection between an entity and a person, place, or time, as claimed.

In particular, some scholars have specifically focused on "authenticity work," identifying the various strategies through which organizations craft authenticity claims (Beverland, 2005; Dobrev & Verhaal, 2024; Ganzin et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2005; Jones & Smith, 2005; Voronov et al., 2023). Authenticity work is defined as organizations' deliberate efforts to project authenticity to their audiences (Peterson, 2005) or to develop and sustain credible authenticity claims (Voronov et al., 2023). This body of literature suggests that authenticity relates to how well an entity responds to a referent. It is something explicitly claimed, actively pursued, managed, and primarily audience-dependent (Dobrev & Verhaal, 2024), especially when serving strategic purposes such as competitive differentiation (Cattani et al., 2017; Voronov et al., 2023), commercial success, or brand recognition (Beverland, 2005; Koontz, 2010). However, how authenticity is played out in everyday practice, and not only claimed, remains somewhat unaddressed.

AUTHENTICITY AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODELS

A growing body of research highlights how authenticity can act as a strategic driver in the development of sustainable business models, particularly in sectors where cultural, social, and territorial values are central to value creation (Erhardt et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2018; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020).

Erhardt et al. (2022) demonstrate how authenticity-driven enterprises leverage social values such as community collaboration and local embeddedness to create both economic value and social sustainability. They suggest that authenticity plays a central role in building business models that prioritize ethical growth and inclusion. Similarly, Palmi and Lezzi (2020) explore how traditions can be recombined to innovate business models in Italian agritourism, fostering authenticity and aligning inherited values with contemporary sustainability goals, such as ecological responsibility and the preservation of cultural identity.

However, despite the interest in authenticity as a strategic asset for sustainability, there is still limited understanding of how authenticity work can concretely support the design and implementation of sustainable business models (Schaltegger et al., 2016). We argue that adopting a situated perspective on authenticity work can offer valuable insights into this relationship.

In this chapter, we examine the concept of authenticity work in relation to the development of sustainable business models in the context of craft. We suggest that craft represents a unique form of production in which authenticity can be explored through the act of making, focusing on the practical rather than the narrative dimension of authenticity, and on the producer's perspective rather than the audience's. This approach offers a distinctive opportunity to reflect on the ways in which craft makers foster the sustainability of their business models. In the following section, we introduce the concept of craft, highlighting its uniqueness as a form of production and its deep connection to authenticity, time, and place.

CRAFT AS A PECULIAR FORM OF PRODUCTION

Recently, organization and management studies began to dedicate growing attention to crafts (Kroezen et al., 2021), especially for their potential of addressing contemporary grand challenges, such as promoting more sustainable ways of living and producing (e.g., Weber et al., 2008). At the center of all forms of craft is the "craftsmanship" of doing – human know-how, tacit knowledge

passed down through generations, and the physical dexterity involved. Unlike other forms of production, crafts typically involve a degree of manual labor – "a skill of making things well" (Sennett, 2008) – and require cultural capital to facilitate esthetic appreciation and practical creativity in blending art with function (Romain, 2016; Takuya & Takayama, 2010). These practices often involve a mix of traditional and modern skills, rooted in local communities (Blundel & Smith, 2013) and are viewed as particularly sustainable forms of production, as opposed to mass industrial ones.

We argue that authenticity, both in the making process and from the perspective of the producer, is deeply embedded in this form of production. Craft provides a vital setting in which to explore and advance the conversation around authenticity work and its connections with sustainability. To further conceptualize this, we examine craft's twofold time-based and place-based nature.

CRAFT AND TIME

Although Kroezen and colleagues (2021) define craft as a *timeless* alternative approach to work, we argue that craft is an inherently temporal concept. We define temporality as the relationships between past, present, and future (Ravasi et al., 2019; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). First of all, craft is a creative act performed in the present, but connecting with the past. In its traditional forms, craft directly reminds the past, for example, thanks to antique materials or techniques used. Also in its neo-craft tendencies (Gandini & Gerosa, 2023), it still evokes some past remnants, even if less directly, because it is related to pre-industrial ways of production, for example, making things slowly, with the use of hands. To this purpose, Bell et al. (2021) speak about "imaginaries of craft" that determine how societies, communities, organizations, and individuals embody temporal relations to the past that extend into the present and future. They argue that most craft imaginaries are past-oriented, since they embed a nostalgic idea of the past, which can be understood as a response to the desire for authenticity and human meaning in modern life (Beverland, 2005), which is often found in relation to the past and to a place. The act of making – whether it is pottery, textiles, or any other craft – becomes a means to engage with the past while contributing to the cultural and social vibrancy of the present.

But also, Bell and colleagues (2021) advocate the concept of "future-oriented craft imaginaries" defined as collective visions that reimagine and adapt traditional craft practices to address contemporary and forthcoming

societal challenges. These imaginaries serve as transformative tools for the future, and the authors, therefore, show how craft can be connected to the future too, given that historical craft skills can be innovatively translated to remain relevant in the future, potentially addressing future grand challenges.

CRAFT AND PLACE

Craft, in its various forms such as pottery, glassmaking, textile production, and jewelry, has historically been rooted in specific geographic regions that provide access to necessary materials and energy sources. This place-based nature of craft has given rise to unique dynamics within craft clusters, where regional characteristics – such as availability of raw materials, local skills, and cultural heritage – have shaped both the production and identity of these crafts (Comunian & England, 2019; Gibson, 2016; Tanghetti et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2021).

The place-based nature of craft becomes evident within public debates that have especially regarded the crafts' instrumental role in rural (Jones et al., 2021) or urban (Brandellero & Naclerio, 2025) development. While traditional craft production may not always scale in the same way as other industries, it has nonetheless attracted attention due to its potential to drive educational, cultural, and economic agendas (McHattie et al., 2019). Policymakers have increasingly recognized craft as a means to stimulate local and regional economies, enhance skill development, and promote sustainable practices through the use of local materials and knowledge.

Another significant aspect of craft's role in local development is its ability to foster a sense of place to residents. Craft-making practices, particularly those tied to regional heritage, offer a medium through which communities can celebrate and preserve their local identity. In historic towns, for instance, craft production can serve as a vehicle for reflecting on and revitalizing the role of heritage in everyday life (Kouhia & Rönkkö, 2020).

Additionally, craft practice has the potential to build a sense of community, particularly in urban environments. Groups such as knitting circles or women's collectives demonstrate how craft can facilitate the creation of identity and attachment to place (Platt, 2019). These social spaces, where individuals gather not to produce a marketable product but to engage in affective labor, highlight the emotional and relational aspects of craft.

Moreover, the revival of craft practices plays a crucial role in tourism, especially in the context of the growing demand for authentic experiences.

Tourists seeking genuine, place-based encounters are increasingly drawn to destinations where local crafts offer a tangible connection to the history, culture, and values of the community (Fletchall, 2016). By engaging with local craft traditions, visitors are not only purchasing souvenirs but also participating in the preservation and celebration of regional identities. This trend aligns with the broader global interest in sustainable, culturally rich, and community-oriented tourism, further cementing the value of craft in place-based development strategies (Revilla & Dodd, 2003).

In conclusion, the literature acknowledges that craft's place-based nature offers significant opportunities for local development, not just in economic terms, but also in fostering a deeper sense of community and heritage. Whether through the lens of regional economic revitalization, community cohesion, or tourism, the role of craft in shaping and celebrating a sense of place remains vital in the contemporary world. As such, craft emerges as a fertile ground for the development of sustainable business models, those that not only ensure economic viability but also create and deliver value to a broader range of stakeholders, including local communities and the environment (Schaltegger et al., 2016).

AUTHENTICITY WORK IN CRAFT: WEAVING COHERENCE ACROSS TIME AND PLACE

We argue that weaving coherence in time and place throughout the production process is what makes craft "authentic" and a resource for the development of sustainable business models. But there are different modes of doing so. From a situated perspective on authenticity work – one that focuses on the ongoing practices through which authenticity is practiced in craft work – we propose a framework of six modes of weaving coherence (Table 4.1). We developed this framework conceptually, intersecting the two main streams of literature reviewed above: (a) on one dimension, we identified the *maker* (individual), the *making* (the performance) and the *made object* (the object), as the main targets of authenticity discussed by Lehman et al. (2019); (b) on the other dimension, we identified *time* and *place*, as two relevant dimensions of craft, as discussed in the craft literature (Bell et al., 2021; Comunian & England, 2019). As the framework was built up, we made sense of the six resulting modes, also based on insights from the empirical evidence of an ongoing fieldwork project exploring craft work. We thus followed a rather abductive process in our theorizing process.

Table 4.1. Craft Authenticity Work as Weaving Coherence in Time and Place.

	Modes of Weaving Coherence in Time	Modes of Weaving Coherence in Place
Maker	*Threading* Connecting craft makers' past experiences and familiar legacy together with identity of the present and the image of the future	*Embroidering* Creating relationships with people on a territory grounded on shared values and common cultural heritage
Making	*Patchworking* Mixing the old and the new as for materials, techniques, final objects	*Knitting* Networking on the territory with local craftmakers in the production process and to solve problems
Made object	*Layering* Adding present meanings and functions to old ones, and embedding makers' past and present identity in the object	*Blockprinting* Relating object's features to the place

Source: Authors' elaboration.

WEAVING COHERENCE IN TIME

Threading. For some artisans, craftmaking was not the first choice in terms of career, but came as a result of multiple, different experiences, in various contexts, for example, education or travels. Nevertheless, these experiences have been fundamental for them to become who they are as craftmakers in the present. As in a thread, they tend to weave together – consciously or unconsciously – elements of their past into their current practice, allowing them to be projected toward the future of their business, imagining it accordingly. This does not mean that their paths are necessarily coherent, but that they could find their own personal way to connect the dots and feel coherent as makers in the present. This also happens when craftmaking is inherited from other family members, posing an issue between the development of the craftmakers' own identity and the still present cultural legacy deriving from the past. From their families, craftmakers take lessons on discipline and attitudes at work, but develop independently, not without difficulties, their own technical style to take distance from the past and move toward the future of their business and their work. This dynamic process of connecting past experiences with present identity and future aspirations enables craftmakers to shape business models that are not only economically viable but also grounded in cultural continuity and personal meaning. In this sense,

threading becomes a generative resource for sustainable business models, as it informs the maker's value proposition, reinforces long-term commitment, and strengthens the embeddedness of the enterprise in social and territorial contexts.

Patchworking. As in patchwork, the inherent process of making craft is made coherent through time by combining materials, techniques, and objects in a way in which the past is preserved but also projected toward the future through innovations. Craftmakers carry out and balance this mix between the old and the new in different ways. Or also, new and more advanced materials are inserted in traditional manufacturing. New and old materials and techniques can finally be blended for the creation of a new final product. This patchwork-like logic of combining traditional and innovative elements over time is key to the development of sustainable business models in craft. By blending old and new materials and techniques, craftmakers not only preserve cultural heritage and traditional skills but also adapt it to contemporary contexts and future challenges. *Patchworking* enables therefore the creation of a business model that is both rooted in the past and forward-looking, fostering its continuity, innovation, resilience, and long-term viability.

Layering. The main mode through which an artisanal product is made authentic by its own maker is making it coherent with his/her own identity. The product has therefore different layers of meaning, which reflect makers' attitude, values, and thoughts, in its esthetic or in its spirit/functionality. Coherence is created more internally than externally, that is, craft makers care more about their internal judgment of coherence than the external one (e.g., from customers). Layering is even more evident when the products made by artisans nowadays are derived from traditions of the past, but are re-contextualized in the present with new functions to allow the business to be economically sustainable for the future, while also creating value for the community identity by maintaining a connection to heritage. Coherence here is made by finding, not always with ease, a meaningful balance between the new and the old function, so that they can coexist and not exclude one another, allowing craft-based enterprises to remain economically viable and culturally meaningful over time.

WEAVING COHERENCE IN PLACE

Embroidering. As an embroider makes on a surface, coherence is created through place and with place by cultivating relationships with people who are gravitating around the craftmakers and their ateliers, with whom they

share the same values. They are not necessarily colleagues (see "making"), but local residents of the street and the neighborhood, or even tourists, with whom craft makers create an interaction that results in being fruitful in one way or another. This can happen even with tourists, "curious travelers" who move away from the beaten tracks and find craft shops where is possible to have a chat with the maker and cultivate a relationship which, even if short, enriches both sides. Many craftmakers decide to stay or to move to a territory, often because that place embodies a specific cultural heritage itself, which acts as an attractor and favorable point of installation of an activity. The place is because it is inherently and coherently connected to the maker's identity and production. Place provides not only materials and work connections (see "making"), but coherent background for one's own job, in terms of culture (e.g., familiar culture), inspiration (e.g., the one given by nature), and presence of a community of peers to which find a more spiritual connection, beyond the practical one. Through embroidering place becomes a generator of social, cultural, and even spiritual capital that supports long-term value creation beyond mere profitability. The situated and relational nature of craft practices enables craftmakers to build resilient models of business grounded in meaningful connections and place-based identity, key elements for sustainability.

Knitting. The construction of coherence in the craft making process is often given by a detailed knitting of collaboration between artisans of the same territory which allows the delivery of an inherently "authentic" final product. Craft makers give value to the collaboration with local suppliers due to a better ability to understand each other, given the similar small dimension, the tailor-made production, and the high quality of the materials. Coherence is also created by a supporting environment that allows the final product to be the result of a shared making process in which craftmakers receive support from other artisans for solving problems of a different nature. Building coherence through *knitting* among local artisans contributes directly to the development of sustainable business models by fostering shared value creation, mutual support, and high-quality production rooted in territorial coherence. This mode of collaboration also promotes the use of local resources and skills, reducing environmental impact and reinforcing the local economy, thus contributing to both social and environmental sustainability.

Blockprinting. In the made object, coherence is created by "blockprinting" a feature of the place on the object. This is often the case when products reproduce architecture or images of territories in their esthetics or shapes. By embedding visual and symbolic references to the local territory into the esthetics or form of the final product, craftmakers transform place into a

tangible asset – one that generates cultural, emotional, and commercial value. Therefore, *blockprinting* supports the development of sustainable business models by aligning production with place-based identity, fostering cultural continuity, and enhancing the attractiveness and uniqueness of the offering, key drivers for long-term economic and cultural sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explores authenticity through the lens of craft, showing how it is not merely claimed but actively constructed in practice. Focusing on the "authenticity work" involved in craft production, we highlight how craftmakers coherently weave their selves, making processes, and objects across time and place. Using the metaphor of weaving, we conceptualize six modes of authenticity work that integrate the past, present, and future of both maker, process and object, and the places where craft is created.

By proposing authenticity as the weaving of coherence across time and place, this chapter shifts the discourse from audience-dependent claims to a producer-oriented, practice-based perspective. It emphasizes authenticity as a dynamic, ongoing process rooted in everyday practice rather than a fixed trait or narrative. The temporal and place-based nature of craft offers a valuable, different lens for understanding how authenticity is built within specific cultural and geographical contexts.

We demonstrate how this authenticity work allows craftmakers to embed identity, values, and locality into their creations, generating multiple layers of value – economic, social, cultural, and environmental. As such, weaving coherence becomes a strategic resource for developing sustainable business models. Craft enterprises can thus deliver value beyond profit, fostering continuity, innovation, and cultural rootedness and care for community and place.

This chapter also contributes to research on craft as a living, evolving practice. It offers new insights into the interplay of authenticity, place, and creative labor in today's society. We encourage further inquiry into how authenticity is actively constructed across diverse forms of production and how these processes can inform both theory and practice in organizational and entrepreneurship studies.

Our framework offers artisans and cultural entrepreneurs a practical tool to reflect on and develop sustainable, authenticity-grounded business models. Rather than relying on externally imposed claims, this perspective highlights the ongoing, situated work through which coherence is built across life experience, material choices, territorial and historical ties.

By connecting personal histories with current practices and future aspirations, artisans can craft models that are economically viable, meaningful, and resilient. The six modes of authenticity work – such as patchworking tradition and innovation, layering values into products, embroidering local ties, and knitting collaborative networks – enable the creation of value-rich ecosystems. These approaches foster local embeddedness; reduce environmental impact; and build emotional, social, and symbolic capital. Ultimately, this empowers craft-based and cultural enterprises to move beyond profitability toward socially inclusive, culturally grounded, and environmentally sustainable forms of entrepreneurship.

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