

## **DEVELOPING LOCAL ARTISANS BY DESIGN**

*Ayhan Ensici*, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

Keywords: Handcraft jewellery, Local artisan, Industrial Design

### **1. Introduction**

This paper is about an SME development project funded by the European Commission, and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in coordination with the GAP Regional Development Administration of Turkey. Objective of the project was to improve trade capacities of the local artisans producing ‘Telkari’ entrepreneurs located in Mardin, in the Southeastern Anatolia Region by providing design development services through the GIDEM offices

UNDP the project titled “Developing Silver ‘Telkari’ Handcrafting” is conducted between February 2004 and May 2005. Author of the paper task was work as an design expert in the project.

On another level, Mardin is a historical city that has a significant potential in Tourism sector and the number of tourists visiting the city is expected to increase considerably in the future. Thus, silver “*Telkari*” producers are willing to improve their production techniques and market the “Unique Mardin “*Telkari*” Handcrafted Products” to the tourists and later to the foreign markets as well as on alternative distribution channels. However the sector is not ready to take advantage of the expanding market. First and foremost the craft is unfortunately endangered due to the lack of resources and apprentices. Secondly, the limited number of silver “*Telkari*” designs especially designs to be used as interior decoration material is yet another obstacle for increasing sales.

Because of the new masters don’t grow up in last 20-30 years, thousands of years Telkari production tradition is limited by producing counted models. In last years with the stability trend in political and economical situation of the region is the main dynamic of tourism revival. New master’s generation showed interest to this handcrafting because of newly developing economical potential.

Designing and developing their own products that appears as a critical problem can be solved by making Telkari artisans’ to design by themselves. For solving this problem, project works has been extended with workshops to teach new approaches and methods to the telkari masters and apprentices. This paper includes project process, new Telkari models designed by author and the proposal of a methodology which can be used by artisans to develop new designs. Methodology also aims to manage process control.

The project constituted of 4 phases; Research phase, First workshop, New designs, Second workshop

Author worked as design expert in the project to improve new designs and conducted two workshops with artisans to teach them design and designing. Also author conducted field studies, hold meetings with the local artisans and develop new jewellery designs compatible to telkari techniques. New designs are now being produced by local artisans. Conclusions of the project and the obstacles of working with handcraft artisans are explored in this paper.

## 2. Telkari

Silver “Telkari” handcrafting is an art that has been implemented in the upper Mesopotamian plain since 2000 B.C. Today, Mardin and Midyat are the two centres where artisan jewellers are pursuing this unique artistic handcrafting activity as micro enterprises. Approximately 15 artisans in both provinces process 1.500 kg of rough silver per annum and create an added value of 150% to the rough material used.

### Telkari handcrafting process:

1. *Melting silver in a pot:* 950 rough Silver bars and the rummage silver pieces are melt in a pot which is heated by LPG.
2. *Casting:* melted silver is poured into the 50x1,5x1cm cavity on a steel block
3. *Rolling silver rod;* Silver rods are rolled in different grooves on rolling machine from thicker to thinner. After this proces different wire Silver rods is made between 1mm and 0,3 mm wires optionally.
4. *Circular Rolling:* After making silver stripes, they are rolled in flat rolls.
5. *Making leitmotives:* In this stage generally *Telkari* artisans, mostly apprentices, prepare multitudinous motives separately which will be used in their original products they are producing. ‘*Kakil*’, on of the main motives, are prepared in its basic form and they are adjust according to the place they shall be in.
6. *Preparing frames of the product;* Main frame of the product is formed. This frame is both structural component and motive holder of the product.
7. *Putting motives in the frames:* Motives are put in the frames according to the artisans’ design.
8. *Welding motives and the frames;* Motives set in the frames are welded with silver powder.
9. *Clearing products;*
10. *Final forming;*
11. *Polishing*

## 3. Telkari in Mardin

Telkari carrying out in two place, Mardin and Midyat by limited artisans and workshop who are completely Syrians. Syrians are the Turkish Orthodox Christians whom are the one of the first tribe accepted Christianity in the Middle East right after birth of the religion. In Mardin, center of city, there are three artisans. Suphi Hindiyeirli, is a master working as a teacher in Telkari course belonging to Mardin governship, came back to Mardin after 25 years living in Istanbul. He is a typical example for the loss of in skill of mastery of handcrafting.

In Midyat number of artisans, although much in respect of Mardin, is less than ten. These masters are also completely from Syrian community whose names are; *İsa Ergin, Musa Ergin, Nuri Ergin, Abut Demir, Aziz Dilmeç, Ercan Didiş, Melek Akyol, Sami Akyol, Gebro Tokgöz, Hilal Yaşlı*. New apprentices are working in the workshops and learning handcrafting near these artisans.

General aspect of today’s Telkari handcrafting is low profitable though it’s labour dense process. Presently products that are being producing in Mardin are the traditional products which have many years of past. Brand new and different products aren’t being developing. Monotony of products leaves behind the characteristics of Mardin Telkari and in this respect products are getting their prices according to their weight in grams not to the product itself.

Because of artisans' competitions in Mardin depends on reducing prices instead of product differentiation reduces the prices to the reasonable minimum limit. Workshop producing same models have only the price as a competition tool.

It is observed that Telkari artisans are hesitant and conservative in producing new models except their ordinary ones. Authenticity deprivation decreases general interest to the Telkari handcrafting. Producers in Mardin and Midyat prefer to produce in few numbers from traditional small models, and one piece or sometimes none from bigger models. Low product variety causes low number sales per client.

As a consequence, nowadays, prices of Telkari, so the prices of Telkari labour move at the possible minimum levels. Low profit ratio creates unwillingness in general for old artisans and they tend to commerce. As a necessity of commerce increasing product range makes them to bring new products from out of Mardin. The threat is tradesman choose profit margin of ready-made products. Local workshops enhance their product variety by buying from China and Beypazari. *Beypazari is a town in the capital of Turkey which realized a great development in being a touristic place. Beypazari announced Telkari as it's authentic handcrafting although they know it by a Armenian artisan whom migrated from Mardin one hundred years ago.* Beside Telkari other types of silver works, importing from Istanbul constituting most of the products in the shopwindows, and their ratio is increasing gradually.

Difficulties in practice of Telkari is the main reason not being in demand by young generations of artisan families in last 20-30 years. Nowadays workers in workshops are the only the artisans whom had an interval for years and the young people who had an interest to the profession after the developments in political conditions of the region and the touristic affinity.

### **3.1 Conclusion for the Telkari in Mardin**

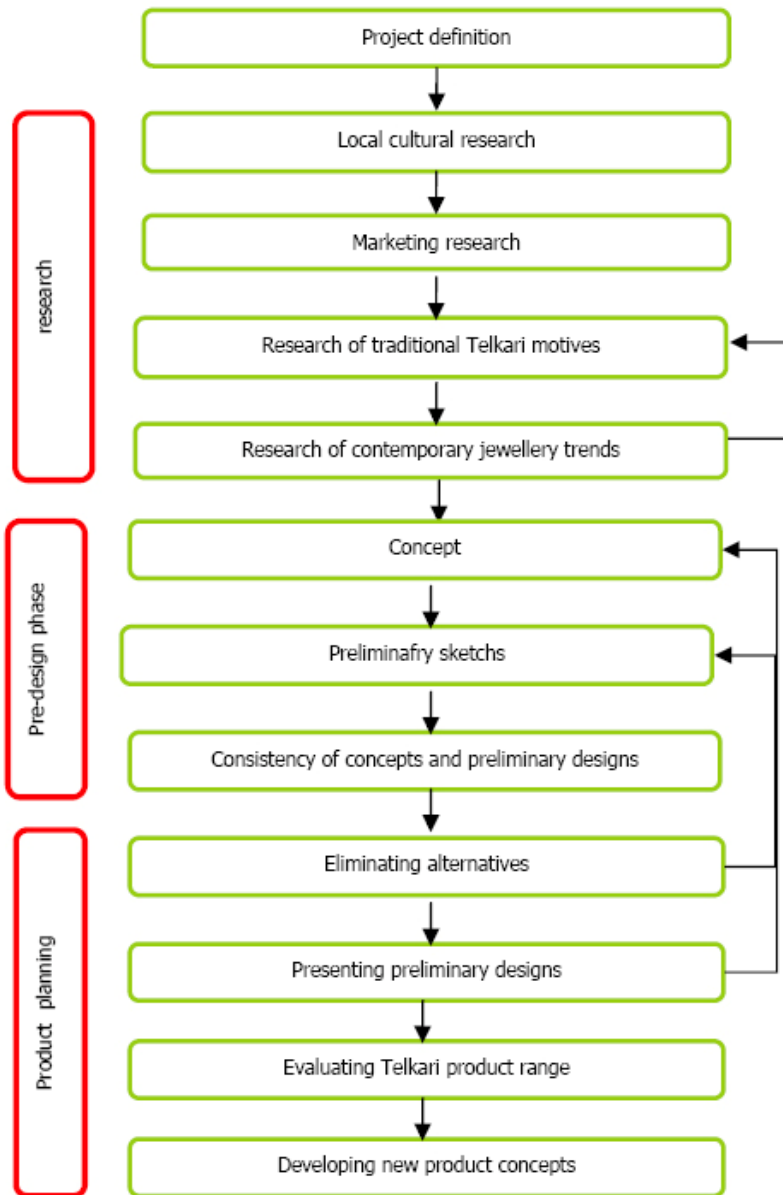
Most important conclusions can be notice about the Telkari in Mardin;

- If the national and international rivals of Telkari handcrafting out of Mardin is take into consideration, it is obvious that originality is inevitable. Reflecting local features gets importance.
- Design works on Telkari have to develop on two different aspects; first is designing brand new and different products, and second is designing new and original motives.
- Processes of convincing local artisans to design new products and to make them taking part in such project are to plan regardfully.
- Project has to be planned to make artisans to design new products continuously.
- New telkari designs have to be applicated by masters and detecting probable practice problems is necessary for familiarizing them with designing and applicating new products.

## **4. Project Process**

Whole project was consist of extensive design work which was aiming not only creating new product and also developing a methodology to be followed by artisans. Researching cultural values to be used in new models increased the work density. Project flow chart is;

*(see pp. 23-24)*



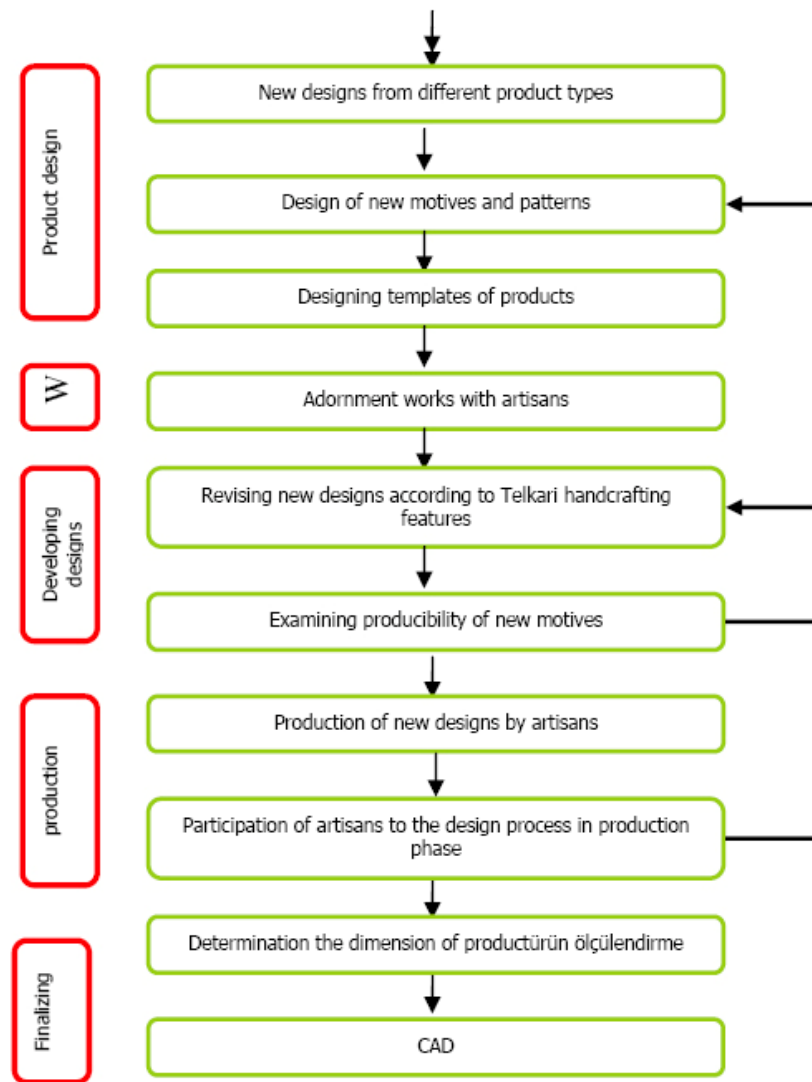


FIGURE 1. Project Process

## 5. Primary Workshop

### 5.1 Aims of the Workshop

More dynamic structure of the jewellery, gift and accessories market create their own fashions. Telkari handcrafting that related all those market, must catch the same characteristics for adaptation and enhancing sales. For this obligatory the fundamental tool is developing new designs and and new models continuously.

Important point is, new models have to be designed by artisans. In this respect, first workshop is conducted with artisans with considering this point. Beside this workshop supplied the chance of observing reactions of artisans to the developing new models

## 5.2. Workshop

Workshop is conducted with two steps in two days. First day, at the first step, with a seminar all the telkari artisans informed about the Telkari, known as **Filigree**, in the world. Observations and evaluations about Suriye, Croatia, Istanbul and Beypazarı made Telkari, are told.

After the seminar, frames on the paper, belonging to a figure designed by author, are given to artisans and requested to adorn them with patterns as they wish. During and after the workshop it is argued and evaluated with artisans, potentials of the new model on production, sale and marketing trends.



FIGURE 2. Samples from workshop

Different new frames belonging to two figures beside the frame they already did once are given to artisans to be made after the workshop. Filling one of them is requested. Second day frames that they adorned are collected, their new models and their approaches about new models and developing new models are discussed. Model designed and adorned by author is produced for analyzing the time spend for production of a design they totally not used to.

## 5.3 Conclusion of First Workshop

- Workshop was beneficial determining and observing reactions of the artisans relevant with new models.
- Artisans are insistent on producing models they used to and they are tending to criticizing new models.
- Seminar, at the beginning of workshop about designing pointed out that this kind of lectures is useful for them and their tendency about new models can be observed.
- For the first time, artisans interpreted and evaluated Telkari, they are producing, with a different view
- After the workshop, lots of different adornment works by every artisans indicated the huge variety of alternatives can be obtained with one frame.
- Despite all this works artisans are hesitant to design new models. This made obvious the necessity of planned education program instead of short workshop

- Designs which are developed as project outcomes have to be a specimen in place of commercial product, that reflects cultural heritage of Mardin

## 6. New Designs

In the project it is appeared that merely designing new Telkari models isn't sufficient for the artisans' progress. In this respect more easy and convenience ways of enhancing product variety are told artisans. As a beginning phase concepts for new product ranges are developed. New concepts formed with using actual and global themes, considering dynamic marketing characteristics of jewellery and accessories.

- Animal Figures Theme,
- Zodiac Theme,
- Music Instruments Theme,

One of designs from Animal Figures Theme is used in the first workshop for adornment practice. After the workshop, within a small lecture other themes are explained and discussed on designing new products.

Designing new Telkari models as the main objective of the project is put off after this phase. According to initial project program, limited in number models would be designed by the author. But all the observations obtained from researches pointed out that to give models to artisans and expect them to use new models by themselves wouldn't be productive enough for the project progress. So, carrying out new models with artisans and determining difficulties while they practicing, is important to modify the models for optimum application. Two points are fatal for new models. First is designing models considering Mardin cultural features, second is new designs have to be easy for artisans' practice. Making of new adornments have to be similar to the ones they used to.

In this section designing models considering Mardin cultural features, will be extended. Beside well known architectural adornments, Mardin region have endless cultural wealth that depends on many civilizations', settled in the area through the history. Different languages and different religions in Mardin are the indicators of the diversity.

**“Civilizations”** theme is selected for the conceptual base both accent cultural features to the adornments of the Telkari handcrafting and make artisans to sustain designing new Telkari products with the same source by themselves. Throughout the over 5000 years civilizations, such as Asurs, Roman Empire, Seljuk Empire, Arabian, Artuklular, Ottoman Empire, and Turkish Republic leaved great cultural affluences to the region that creativity can be nourished.

Heritages of the countless civilizations are not used solely designing new Telkari products but also designing new patterns and motives different from 'vav' and 'kake' patterns which are presently being used by local artisans'. Furthermore basic motives of Telkari handcrafting are interpreted for creating brand new patterns.

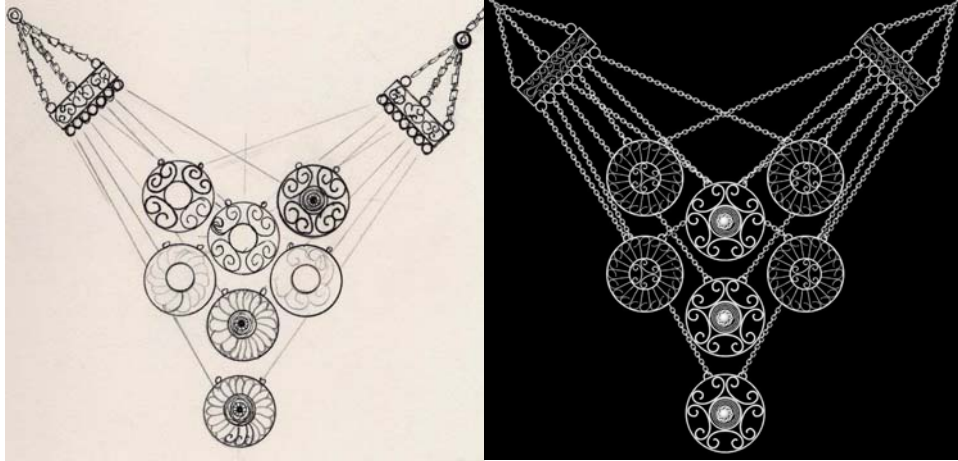


FIGURE 3. “Belief”, “İnanç”

### 7. Second Workshop Phase

Second workshop is conducted for detecting the problem while they are producing new designs. Aim of the second workshop is, more than augmenting familiarity like in the first, developing the new models that will be designed, with considering the production problems.

In the workshop progress, with the participation of the masters to the design process;

- Examining the production of new patterns and motives,
- Describing new models to the artisans,
- Opinions of the artisans about the new designs,
- Observing the problems arose in the production process,

Workshop planned as three days. Before these three days, a preliminary meeting has organized with the telkari masters Adnan Sağlamoğlu, Suphi Hindiyeerli and Master Hanna, who will participate in the workshop.

On the second day, after the preliminary meeting, measured drawings belong to one of the new designs, could be used as templates are given to masters. Before giving drawings new design are explained to them. Same drawing is given both of them. Right after the ending of the first one’s production, second ones and the other’s drawings would be given to the artisans. Workshop goal was to produce at least five models in three days. Telkari masters was able to produce only the first model in the workshop process.

### 8. Conclusion

Comparing production time of models Telkari masters get used to with the production duration of the new models considerable difference appeared. Production of a new design, which is given with all the measurements on the paper, has taken approximately 24 hours. Although always producing a handcrafting for the first time needs more time, that duration is excessive.

Telkari artisans because of the low profit margin, they have to produce plenty numbers of Telkari. This aspect makes them to produce the traditional models they well know and the models they can produce in fastest way.

Moulded Telkari products, coming from Istanbul and Far East, threat can be converted to advantage with producing with underlining value of handcrafting. Underlining handcrafting needs to produce elegant models.

It has to be taking into consideration that Beypazari went to the fore by product variety and developing global models. Mardin Telkari requires designing new models that reflects its own cultural features. This project structured mainly for the aim of educating artisans about designing. Furthering Telkari more than a wire work and to get the sustainable development can be able by benefit from roots of Mardin.

Designed products in this project emphasize cultural heritages of the civilizations of Mardin with considering traditional motives and producing methods. Identity of the region is used in models by motives and patterns. On the other side contemporary consumption trends are quoted.

Telkari artisan candidates have to be grow up with new product development custom. This can be organized civil institutions.

For sustainable development of Telkari, it has to be founded new public institutions that support and promote Telkari art.

### **Design Methodology**

For developing new Telkari designs a Design Method developed and proposed according to the social - economic conditions of the Telkari masters and existing situations in Mardin:

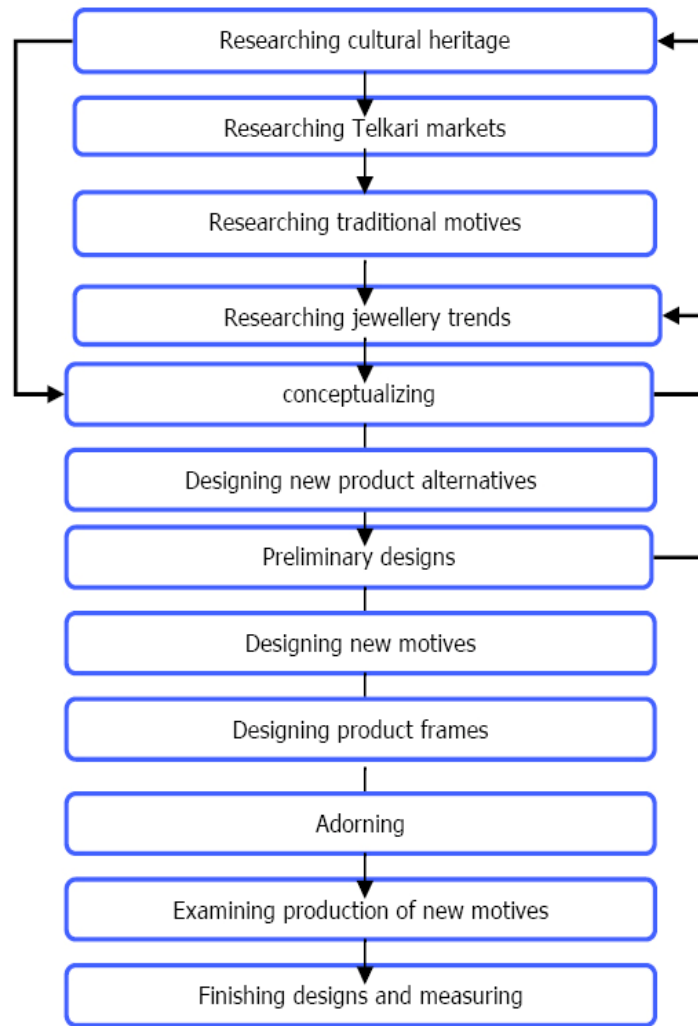


FIGURE 4. Design methodology

*References:*

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