THE INTANGIBLES
Values of Heritage Products
For Design and Sustainability Initiatives

“An object is not an object, it is the witness to a relationship” (Cecilia Vicuna)

Values are attributed to products over time and across generations. They are created, compiled, shared, evolved, exchanged, and also discarded. However, creating an explicit theory and analysis on this subject is challenging due to the abstract and multifaceted nature of the topic with a plethora of theories from various research communities. To manage this complexity, this research focuses on the concept of values in association with heritage products: products that are inherited from the previous generation, in material and immaterial forms. The exploration entails identifying values of heritage products and their potential applications in design and sustainability initiatives and was conducted based on the main research question below:

How can the values of heritage products be identified and applied as a creative resource for design and sustainability initiatives?

Following this question, the exploration has been divided into two parts. Part 1 focuses on identifying and understanding the values of heritage products and Part 2 presents the adaptation of values of heritage products as a creative resource in design and sustainability initiatives. This exploration is framed against the backdrop of the cultural economy which connects the craft and design domains, includes the discourse of the intangible cultural heritage, and brings forward the craft industry as the empirical context.

Heritage products as an object of inquiry can act as a catalyst for discourse that brings the craft and the design. Through the use of a set of tools and procedures implemented in design intervention sessions, the research explores how tacit knowledge associated with heritage products can be represented, learned, and transformed into explicit forms. This transformation enables the research to identify, describe, and understand the composition of values attributed to heritage products over time and across generations. The results showcase the complexity and multidimensional nature of values associated with heritage products which can be viewed as a hierarchical structure, identified as either inherited or contemporary and clustered as either individual or collective. The research also explores two potential areas of applications for values of heritage products a) adapted as one of the creative resources in the product development process and b) used as a resource to elicit interactions from the past which can be useful in modern day’s sustainable initiatives.

By: Sarah Suib,
Design for Sustainability (DfS),
Delft University of Technology.