

ESCUELA TALLER

A trainer's perspective

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Abstract. Cultural heritage preservation, while embracing many advances in technology, has fundamentally depended on the continuity of ancient crafts and workshop industries. Worldwide, these are being eroded: declining investment in vocational training; social fragmentation and urbanisation producing an ever more fragile, uprooted workforce; community-based manual production reduced to “souvenirs” for tourists. Carpentry, masonry, and other building crafts embody systems of learning that inculcate both skills and values essential to the vital future of cultural heritage places. They must be safeguarded but also steered towards genuine economic development and social opportunity. In the built heritage sector, training courses for conservation professionals far outweigh the number of accredited programmes for building craftworkers. This paper will use a case study, the Escuela Taller Intramuros craft school in Manila, as a means of examining the broader picture of human development and heritage preservation through craft training.

Culture and human development

Some of the strongest economic arguments in favour of heritage preservation point to the interdependency of workshop crafts, growth and preservation: the impact of labour-intensive, manual practices on job creation; manual arts helping diversify rural production and provide or upgrade housing or infrastructure; authentic crafts seen as cultural and material assets for heritage tourism.

But there are systemic threats. For many developing countries, recent economic growth has not, or only modestly, translated into poverty reduction (Fosu 2010), while social fragmentation and urbanisation produce an ever more precarious labour market. The looming population explosion threatens to undermine what progress has been made (UN DESA 2004). Between 1995 and 2005 job prospects for youth declined everywhere, and rising youth unemployment is an acute concern (ILO 2010). The informal labour sector has been booming for example in India (Jha 2009), where a massive casual workforce with severe income insecurity, weak labor controls, strains on rural employment, and a depressed market for entrepreneurship and self-employment present ominous signs. Even before the recession, the United Nations World Youth Report claimed that young people were increasingly forced into the informal sector out of economic necessity (UN DESA 2003). Population growth in megacities like Manila, Jakarta, Kolkata and Mumbai, at more than 2% per annum, continues to draw mainly young, unskilled or semi-skilled workers into a hostile job market.

For most people, what we call human development – “expanding choices” and “building human capabilities” (Alkire 2010) – means jobs, education, housing, security. Culture, on the other hand, has been called “not a means to material progress, (but) the end aim of “development” seen as the flourishing of human existence in all its forms” (World Commission on Culture and Development 1995). Without disavowing the importance of crafts as significant forms of cultural expression, are we ready and able to envisage a bigger role for craftworkers as producers in the developing economy? Are we hampered by a fear that commodification and exploitation of heritage resources, in a globalised world dominated by tourism and its capacity to “take over and organise much contemporary social and cultural experience” (Urry 1995), debases cultural integrity and impairs the virtue of the “hand-made”? What upstream efforts are needed to unlock development potential in areas where traditional skills are in short supply or inadequately harnessed? What skills are we talking about, and what products ?

Skills as means, not ends

It has been suggested that poor development of “skills” is one of a number of constraints to growth (Adams 2011). By skills development I mean a “comprehensive approach (...) to integrate young women and men in the labour market, including relevant and quality skills training, labour market information, career guidance and employment services, recognition of prior learning, incorporating entrepreneurship

with training and effective skills forecasting” (ILO n.d.). Technical and vocational education are more effective when focused on skills closely linked to market demand, and for the socially disadvantaged training and other sources of skills are more effective where they build on a foundation of good quality basic education (Adams 2011). In Colombia in 2003, 59.9% of working youth lacked full primary education; in the Philippines, 35% (ILO 2010). Where job growth has been limited, as it has been in many developing countries in spite of GDP, the demand for technical and vocational education has been weak, with young people pressed into low paid, low skilled work in the non-organised labour sector. The high cost of formal education is a contributory factor (Canlas & Pardalis 2009).

All of which poses a difficult challenge: while striving to preserve and safeguard traditional crafts in the developing world as ends in themselves, we must work equally hard – or harder – to expand the means available to craftworkers to operate profitably as specialist suppliers, operatives and entrepreneurs. We must help governments and industry embrace vocational skills, on-the-job learning and enterprise within our sector even as we advocate stronger legal protection for cultural heritage.

This means confronting the realities that create imbalanced outcomes in terms of social equality: target workers with a generally weak overall level of general education; production units (small businesses) with a tendency to informalisation (traditional apprenticeships), with inadequate social protection and high income insecurity; high levels of youth unemployment and inadequate business training that hamper growth in the crafts sector; and a still poor record in access to work for women and the poorest.

Escuelas Taller

The Escuelas Taller (“Workshop Schools”) were created in Spain in the 1980s as an initiative of the Instituto Nacional de Empleo (INEM). Their goal was to help the young into work by training them in skills relevant to construction and heritage preservation – sectors acutely short of manpower at that time. Their success led to an exporting of the concept as a program of the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional por el Desarrollo (AECID), which opened the first school in Latin America in 1991 (Leon, Nicaragua). Twenty years on, there are now approximately 40 Escuelas Taller, including in Tetuán, Morocco (2008), Manila, Philippines (2009), Hebron, Palestinian Territories (2010) and across Central and South America.

The Escuela Taller Intramuros, in Manila, was established in 2009 as a partnership program of AECID, the Philippine National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Department for Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Technical Education & Skills Development Authority (TESDA), with the City of Manila and Intramuros Administration local government offices.

The School follows the objectives and principles established by the AECID Cultural Heritage Program worldwide :

- 1. Contributing to heritage preservation as an aspect of social memory
- 2. Encouraging the use and exploitation of heritage places as dynamic agents of economic development
- 3. Building specialist technical capacity in all areas of heritage conservation and management
- 4. Strengthening local heritage institutions
- 5. Mutual enrichment through joint work involving cultural and technical exchange

These objectives provide the framework of action for all Escuelas Taller :

- 1. training focused on traditional and heritage building crafts (masonry, carpentry and metalworks are the most widely represented workshop disciplines)
- 2. encouraging access for students (age 16-24) from underprivileged communities, especially those who have not completed full secondary education.
- 3. Encouraging equal participation of women students
- 4. Cooperative partnership/co-financing with local institutions

In Manila, the students chiefly come from a squatter community in a compound known as BASECO, a shanty town on the shore of Manila Bay comprising some 5,500 families. Many are migrants from Visayas or incomers settled here as a result of Manila slum clearance. Around 70% of youths in BASECO do not finish high school and over 60% of families survive on 5000 Pesos (\$116) a month or less. Work is limited: market porters, deep-sea metal retrievers, garbage collectors, tricycle drivers...

A total of 75 youngsters were chosen for the first batch of students at Escuela Taller Intramuros, selected from interviews and an aptitude test. Aged

between 17 and 24, 77% were male and 23% female. Only 35 (47%) had completed High School. At the end of the 2-year cycle, 27% had dropped out or been expelled from the program.

One feature of the Escuela Taller system is the allowance paid to students (approx. \$1/day). AECID invested 300'000 Euros in the Escuela in the first year, of which roughly 35% is spent on student maintenance.

The Intramuros Administration has provided a site for the school and input into restoration projects at numerous sites in the old city under the Administration's jurisdiction. They include parts of the Casa Manila, a reconstructed traditional townhouse in the Barrio San Luis complex, and a stretch of the city wall inside Fort Santiago. In 2011 students began a project to restore the semi-ruined Sala de Armas (or "Almacenes Reales"), which will be the Fort Santiago Visitor Center. TESDA supplied assistance in formulating and accrediting the level 1 craft modules for the 6 workshop programs (Carpentry, Masonry, Electrical, Plumbing, Woodworks, Painting & Finishing). There are as yet no systems for establishing standards for craft practice in heritage preservation, and the refinement and the curriculum content and compliance with the basic principles of conservation practice has been the responsibility of the School's director, faculty staff and consultant.

The Escuela Taller Intramuros congratulated its first batch of 55 graduates in August 2010. Of these only 42 have to date provided information on their status. Of these, 28 (51%) are currently known to be working in jobs directly relevant to their workshop specialisations (Note: this provisional figure compares well with other AECID Escuelas Taller after two cycles or less. See Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores 2003). 12.8% have been hired by private contractors; 31% are employed on restoration schemes enabled by Escuela Taller Intramuros and local partners (including a handful retained as graduate-assistants to help run the second 2-year cycle); and 7.2% are working as journeyman woodworkers and finishers.

The figures show that such a programme can train capable craftworkers, but that without mechanisms to facilitate their entry into the labour market the craftworkers face challenges converting their skills into relevant jobs. Escuela Taller Intramuros is working to set up a foundation as a platform for future development, and looking into cooperatives and other schemes that could assist individuals to capitalise on their knowledge, confidence and skills. Our current student batch includes a number of students from the provinces, sponsored by local governments

hoping to strengthen capacity for maintaining and repairing some of their historic built assets. The school will soon leave behind the Spanish model and aims to become a leading institution for training and also for advocacy, advice and strategic development of the built heritage sector nationally.

I will conclude by setting out some thematic areas that I see as specially relevant to the school's future course, and to the spectrum of skills and aptitudes that schools like ours, while closely focused on building human resources for the management and



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maintenance of heritage places, should see as relevant and indeed essential to development on a broader social level.

Disadvantage and empowerment

A training programme that aims to improve livelihoods for marginalised, poor and under-resourced communities cannot succeed unless it develops tools and resources that can help learners, especially youth, in formal or informal learning environments, overcome their educational disadvantage. At the Escuela Taller Intramuros, this means improving literacy, numeracy, and various "soft" skills – "learning environments and

outcomes that bring positive changes to people's attitudes as well as strengthening their knowledge and skills." (WHC 2010)

Vocational training should be a foundation for opportunity and fulfilment in the workplace, a vehicle for the human potential and ingenuity that artisans and craftworkers, as well as designers and engineers, might profitably impart to the overall goals of economic and social growth. A feature of conservation practice is its basis in an open system of knowledge where observation, reflexion, trial and adaptation work in synthesis to correct imperfections and failures in a material or structure. This system draws on the dialogue between designer and constructor that is the essence of making. We often hear about how restoration initiatives help to train local craftsmen in traditional arts, ergo how such interventions impact materially on the preservation of traditional cultural practices and places. We know less about where this training leads them in terms of unlocking creative solutions to a range of modern challenges – technical, commercial, environmental. How are the skills acquired retained or expanded? What are the wider impacts on community development and income? What are the risks and how worthwhile the investment?

Escuela Taller Intramuros has encouraged more able students to obtain TESDA certification in two trades, such as masonry and plumbing. Under the present mandate, resources don't extend to follow-up actions to help graduates improve and diversify. Bright young craftworkers would benefit from training pathways that offer real scope to become more motivated and accomplished members of the workforce: heritage restoration requires skilled handworkers but also site foremen, trainers, entrepreneurs. Why not even think in terms of integrating what we think of as graduate-level competencies into their apprenticeship (building economics, preventive conservation, disaster preparedness)?

Demand and supply

Demand for cultural heritage is a difficult thing to measure. We have often been called on to provide skills for renovation projects already up and running where demand is present but expertise lacking. Some of the strongest demand has come from the Catholic church. But demand is not uniform and increasing supply through training alone is not sufficient. Unless we want to "ghetto-ise" traditional building crafts in "historic cities" or world heritage centres, we should have a better idea of what jobs our trainees will do

after graduation. We need a sound grasp of what part the heritage sector might eventually play in a local economy, what other sectors of the industrial or creative economies are relevant to the skills learned, and what other strategies we can devise to embed the manual arts more sustainably within the future socio-economic fabric of developing cities and regions.

A basic premise of the Escuela Taller system is that supply (labour) is created through a partnership model in which local partners provide access to sites or projects where expertise can be honed and tested, with direct preservation benefits. To some degree, the physical presence of a school, rather than a project-centred scheme, has added value. Press coverage, exhibitions, interpretation panels and site work in historic areas can have positive knock-on effects on the demand side. A school is an entity around which a fragmented and incoherent demand begins to coalesce, as we have observed in Manila.

But sustainable solutions require a strategic approach to skills training. Philippine experience has shown that education targeting those outside the formal public schools system, led by local government, community organisations and NGOs with their diverse spectrum of objectives and beneficiaries, has lacked coordination (Di Grapello, Tan and Tandon 2010). Our experience bears this out. Research input nationally and regionally, aimed at auditing relevant skills, identifying competency gaps, assessing markets, improving training strategy and coverage, and incorporating appropriate training into national/local cultural and environmental policies, is needed. On a broader level, structural failures in coordination between overlapping cultural agencies in government, each with their own values and approaches, are a serious constraint. No-one can operate in an environment where there is no effective consultation on standards and policies between different actors working in the heritage sector.

Heritage in construction

The conditions needed to integrate graduates like those of Escuela Taller into local labour markets are also poor. A major challenge is to incentivise specialist training in the construction sector, which has embraced the economics of scale and low-skilled casual labour like no other. While industrialisation is still at a fairly low level, there are opportunities for governments to build capacity within the SMEs who should be the mainstay of historic building repair and maintenance. We have experimented with using local contractors to improve work flow on project sites.

But it is not easy to measure the amount or quality of knowledge transfer, and supervision and site management become complicated for our small staff. The student-trainee model works best when programmes and packages can be more flexibly handled, and outcomes fine-tuned, as in the restoration of our own school site, part of the 18th-century fortified walls of Intramuros.

A training partner is key to the Escuela Taller model. In the Philippines, the TESDA “NC II” certificate is based on industry-standard competencies for different trades. TESDA, our key government partner, offers a range of decentralised programmes (school-, enterprise- and community-based). The premise is that NC II certification in masonry, electrical, plumbing etc. prepares our students for actual jobs. But certification is only partly relevant to the practice of heritage preservation. To meet heritage needs, training has to combine a competency framework recognised for local industrial development with a new set of specialist skills devised according to heritage requirements. We are fortunate to have a partner who shares our concern and is strongly motivated to work with the School to formulate training modules relevant to traditional building technology. Negotiating these is a priority for the coming year. Not only skills but mechanisms for objective assessment, and relevant standards of accomplishment, will have to be devised and strenuously advocated from the top down.

My view is that traditional craft skills should be seen as an adjunct to conventional trades (welding, concrete work, sheet metal work, carpentry). We cannot risk artisans being marginalised by virtue of practising “niche” skills. Escuelas Taller try to compress both conventional and traditional construction training into one programme. An improved model might have youths subsidised to attend a conventional trade school for primary skills. A stronger convergence at this level between sustainable building and building rehabilitation, given the synergies between appropriate technology and traditional technology, might be beneficial. Wider business interests could be better served by such a strategy, and our sector might benefit in turn from Philippine government pledges to stimulate the education and skills sector, construction sector and green economy through public investment. Subsequent higher level certification in craft practice and/or sustainable construction could be developed as a voluntary sector initiative with NGO involvement. For some trades, workshops and businesses with an established record in producing traditional craftwork of the highest standard could be

the nucleus of such a scheme, with youngsters “apprenticed” on completing their primary vocational training. Our programme has developed productive relationships with leading makers like award-winning woodcarver Willy Layug. More efforts will be needed to identify, orientate and recompense the workshops and studios capable of fulfilling this role. Building craft traditions could be more visibly celebrated: nationally, with support from the tourism, construction and creative industries, and regionally, in the manner of the UNESCO crafts prize or ASEAN Awards for Young Artisans.

Realising business potential

Many Escuela Taller schools have introduced enterprise training. As well as craft history, technology, technical and freehand drawing and restoration, training programmes for young artisans must be somehow connected to small business counselling and entrepreneurship for the more aspiring graduates, as well as micro-credit and related services. Escuelas Taller are not resourced to provide integrated business services. But AECID and the governments of Central America have developed mechanisms to assist aspiring young workers to become integrated into the local labour market through business training, orientation and micro-finance (such as the Programa de Formación Ocupacional e Inserción Laboral (FOIL), an initiative of the Central American Integration Partnership).

NGOs in the crafts sector are increasingly involved in strategic support for micro-enterprise, market-readiness advice and resources in the creative sectors (Aid for Artisans, ArtisanConnect, Craftlink). Trade fairs, networks and improved links between heritage, craft and appropriate technology organisations could enhance business prospects and facilitate access to dynamic markets. This could help us map future skills shortages and threats to small producers, and open up marketing and product development opportunities directly relevant to heritage assets. When the last small brickworks in Pasig City closed down after Typhoon Ondoy in 2010 Manila all but lost a centuries-old tradition and sourcing special-sized handmade bricks for repair work is now a problem.

Conclusion

The Escuela Taller concept is not just a training initiative: it combines a trade, complementary education, job-experience, and a wage for students who may not otherwise attain the levels of education needed to work even in semi-skilled industry or services. In urban communities like BASECO, where the schoolroom

is a poor preparation for reality, it provides economic relief. For local government and institutions it delivers tangible benefits to heritage places that would otherwise languish in disrepair. Our experience shows that workshop schools can be significant institutional players for heritage in development. But it also underlines the wider challenges faced in valorising traditional crafts as industries and fashioning a viable “heritage sector” within economies struggling with their MDG development targets.

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