

HOLDING TOGETHER: EXPLORING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OBJECTS VIA DIAGRAMMATIC DRAWINGS

DESIGN AND APPROACHES FOR
SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

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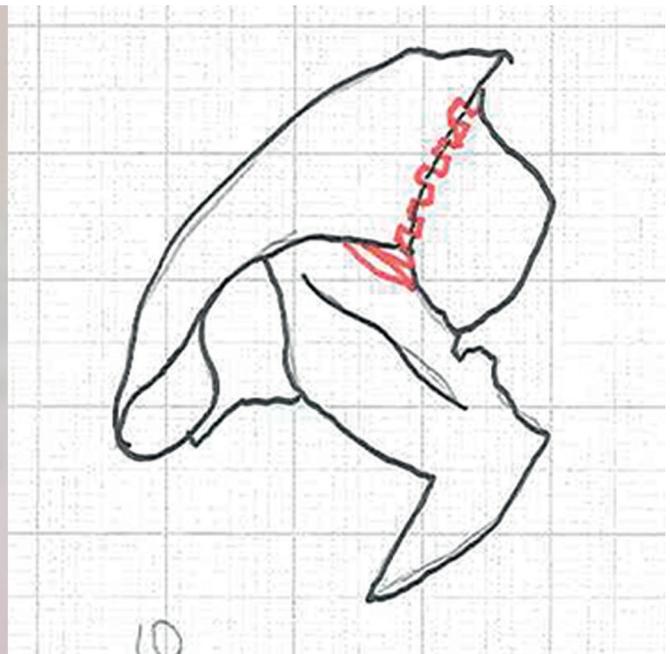
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1.INTRODUCTION:

We present an experimental approach to sustain cultural heritage objects like handmade socks linked with issues such as knowledge transfer for the continuity of craftsmanship. The project amplifies the intuitive production process of cultural objects and learning by doing aspect of handicrafts via diagrammatic drawings while questioning the problematic market conditions by symbolic use of newspaper. Improvised process of our stitching on the paper mimicing traditional crafts is then explored with successive drawings to attain a methodology.

In this paper we propose an artistic approach to sustain intangible cultural heritage objects, in particular hand-knitted socks and their market. The interpretative project demonstrates the making process of handicrafts and builds a two-way communication between makers and audiences via diagrams. Intangible cultural heritage objects usually bear collective history that is based on vocational transfer across generations and communities. By the nature of vocational transfer and also because of the recent changes in daily life and habits, the experience, knowledge, and/or sustainability of handicrafts decreases over time. This project aims to explore ways to sustain the intangible cultural heritage objects by means of a case study about stitching and knitting however the inspiration is based on handmade socks. Like other cultural objects, handmade socks are local and regional elements of Turkey's material culture. Although

Figure 1: Left: the experimental artwork, Right: a diagram to explore and represent one of the stages of the making process.



hand-knitted socks are not objects that are specific to Turkey, the examples are significant due to their regional motives, colors, and compositions. Despite a culturally rooted tradition of making and wearing socks, in recent decades their dominance and significance have been fading as a result of changing indoor climate and fashion. Turkish socks are unique with their motive names and meanings to be used in different circumstances; and accordingly knowledge continuity takes primacy of the project to reflect social connections.

To have a sustainable craft culture and knowledge we propose a project aiming to draw the attention of people who are not directly involved in the context of either intangible cultural heritage objects or handmade socks but who are familiar with or enthusiastic about maker culture.

2.BACKGROUND:

2.1.INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HAND-KNITTED SOCKS

Intangible cultural heritage is a notion that has been developing in the recent decades; and it refers to heritage that is a result of collective knowledge, experience, and culture. For example Scotland’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Project is a “mapping and scoping project” that is developed in partnership with Museums Galleries Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council, and Edinburgh Napier University. The project is based on a web page that gives information about all types of intangible cultural heritage in Scotland on an interactive map. To sustain and preserve the culture, project spreads knowledge via videos and written materials to a large audience (ICH Scotland, 2015). Especially via UNESCO’s preservation attempts, maintaining local heritage has become an important issue for socially responsible projects. According to the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage” in 2003, intangible cultural heritage involves “oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe, traditional craftsmanship” (UNESCO, 2003). Hand-knitted socks fulfill the criteria since 1) the vocational learning is a part of oral traditions and motives are used as a way of self-expression, 2) traditional material generation and knitting is typically a collective group activity which gives the act a performance and social value, 3) socks have sustainable and ecologic life cycles with natural materials, hand production, and re-usability of the material, 4) finally, sock knitting requires certain types of expertise and is a part of traditional crafts culture.

Hand-knitted socks have been part of clothing culture in different regions around the world that diversifies locally in terms of style, material, and usage. The basic components of socks are material, pattern, and color



Figure 2: Socks from Sivas region (Eastern Turkey) The motive is called “ilik/pith” Figure 3: Socks from Balikesir region (Western Turkey) The motive is a type of “eli belinde/hand on hips” Figure 4: Socks from eastern Turkey. White motive is called “deli yılan/crazy snake” and it is used to wish a long and healthy life

however these features may change according to regional influences. Socks from Turkey are significant since they were used as a method of self-expression with their meaningful motives and narrative compositions. The wide range of natural dyes and their usage are also substantial since they signify regional, natural, and cultural features (Böhmer, 2002). However, in this paper we work on the selected features of socks considering them as umbrella features for intangible cultural heritage objects. These features are self-expression, diminishing market of handmade socks, craftspeople, and handmade-ness.

2.2. USING MOTIVES FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

The motives used in socks trace their roots to Central Asia, the shamanic history of the Turkish people, and Anatolian communities which utilize similar motives on other types of craft-work such as weaving and pottery (Erbek, 2002). However the narrative compositions are commonly seen on the socks probably because of their being more mobile to carry. The motives are used as a method of communication and expression. There are motives that signify status and desires; more specifically for wishing a lucky and healthy life, and for identifying marital status, age, and social success. Traditionally colors were used to signify an occupation or status as well, for instance white for local mayors and black for grooms. Originally the colors were generated from natural plants and each region had a specific color range (Özbel 1976, Aktaş and Alaca 2014). On the other hand socks have also been sentimental objects, bearing emotional and intimate stories. These objects have consisted of parts of dowries, given as regional gifts to newborns, to elderly people, and to recently married couples. Wool socks find a large place in the fashion industry and remains as strong supplementaries for cold weather clothing especially in the Scandinavian countries; however traditional elements are not commonly preferred in Turkey, such as motives or natural dyeing. The socks industry in Turkey globalizes; it involves less local visual culture whereas inter-cultural languages have been developed. The unique features of Turkish socks have

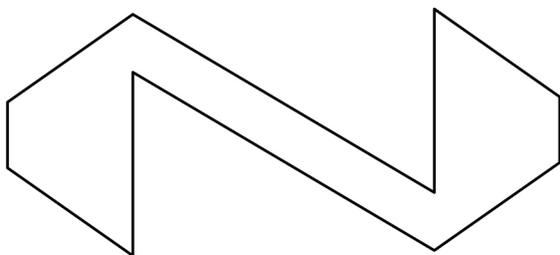


Figure 5: “Gönül çemberi”, a stylized “ying yang”. This motive symbolizes the co-existence of contrasts like good and bad, man and woman. It has its traces from Central Asia where Turkish populations had started spread (Özbel, 1976).

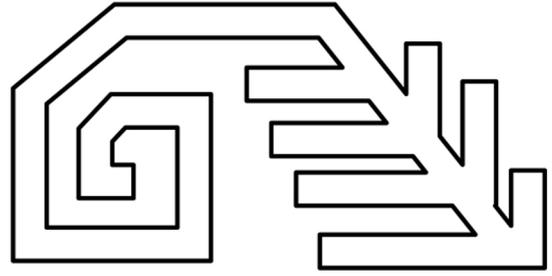


Figure 6: A typical decorative motive that is utilized in various regions (Özbel, 1976).

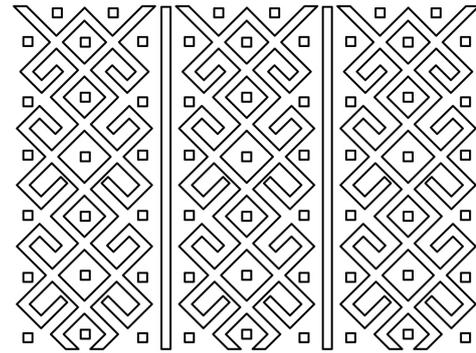


Figure 7: “Ergen bıyığı/adolescent moustache” This motive is utilized in various regions (Özbel, 1976).

already been evolving to mass features and in the long term the narration may completely disappear.

Despite clothing is still a mode of self-expression (Kühler and Miller, 2005), traditional motives and socks are not currently used to give information about the self. Instead, other fashion elements such as Tee-shirts hint at the style of people and sometimes their approach to life.

2.3. CRAFTSPEOPLE, DIMINISHING MARKET OF HANDICRAFTS AND MAKER MOVEMENT

In the production process the craftsperson is the key person involved since the knowledge and experience is transferred from one generation to another through vocational learning. However knitters usually remain outside of the definition of a craftsperson, despite knitting is based on skill, knowledge, experience and expertise, much as any other craft. The craftsperson is associated with his/her passion for perfection in the process of producing (Sennett, 2008) and considering the current working conditions of knitters, a high level of passion is probable. However, the handicraft market has been diminishing as a result of the decline in using handicraft objects, including socks. These regressions affect the craftsperson’s life, working conditions, and the craft itself as well as having a deleterious effect on the intangible cultural heritage of Turkey overall. On the



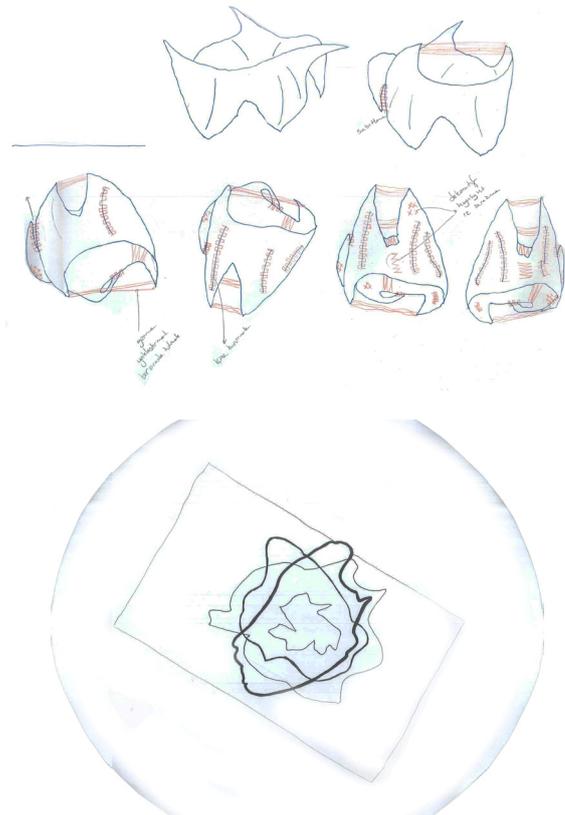
Figure 10: The evaluation of the form is arbitrary and varies in each piece. Since the paper is thin it allows the maker to shape it easily.

mind the audience that handicrafts are and should be a part of daily life with respect to craftspeople and cultural values.

Random and chaotic stitching was developed while conducting the basic stitching on the paper. The initial research leads us to a wider concept which may have influences from the deconstructed weaving works of Sheila Hicks. Her art works still have the frames of weaving however she plays with loop structure by using various materials and using space as another tool (Danto et.al. 2006). In our work, we transform the frame of the surface to 3-dimensions and re-interpret the stitching by changing its elegant environment to something that keys more into uncertain circumstances.

3.2. REVIEWING THE MAKING PROCESS VIA DIAGRAMMATIC DRAWINGS

Telling by drawing is an old method which is a tool to produce knowledge and communicate via knowledge (Gansterer, 2011). Although diagrams are self-explanatory visuals that are used in their individual context the reason behind a diagrammatic narration is usually the desire for communication. They are used in several



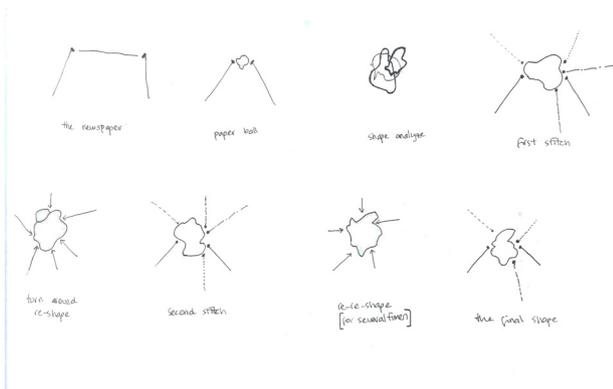


Figure 11, 12, 13: The early diagrammatic drawings. Each drawing focuses on different aspects of the creation process. The first demonstrates the change in form after every stitching in relation with stitching type. The second image emphasizes the moves of the paper, in terms of continuously turning around and getting smaller. This drawing was made on a round paper since there is no right way of holding the newspaper. The third is searching for the difference between the acts of left and right hand before and during stitching. Before stitching both of the hands moves to find a part to stitch on. While stitching left hand stands firm holding the paper and right hand moves to stitch.

fields aimed at giving insight about real world experiences related to people and objects while creating an independent narrative (Bender, Marrinan, 2010, p.21). The local cultures may be influential in designing visuals; however they are also favorable tools for non-verbal global communication. Although locality increases adoption of information by certain communities, a global representation reaches larger audiences (Parsons, 2002). Diagrams are used in instructions for products that are spread to different regions of the world to demonstrate an act without requiring certain knowledge such as language. Educative books also have diagrams that may teach a production method such as knitting or stitching since the production method and materials usually remains the same amongst regions as a result of the collective history.

In this project, diagrams were used 1) to probe the process step by step rather than representing the process and 2) as guide tools to re-interpret tangible design work on a 2-d secondary platform. Although in the beginning we had an experimental approach, the drawings have transformed into a method of explanation that helps to solve the uncertainty of making. The uncertainty comes from the arbitrary nature of pieces in terms of form giving, color combination, and stitching. Visualizing the process helped us to recognize the reasoning behind the instinctive acts and decision making during the process of choosing a space for stitching. The repetitive and thought provoking diagrams helped with the self-discovery of the project. Some of the significant moves that were realized during creation of the diagrammatic drawings are;

1) Change in form: process begins with wrinkling the paper and it continues until the maker decides to stop.

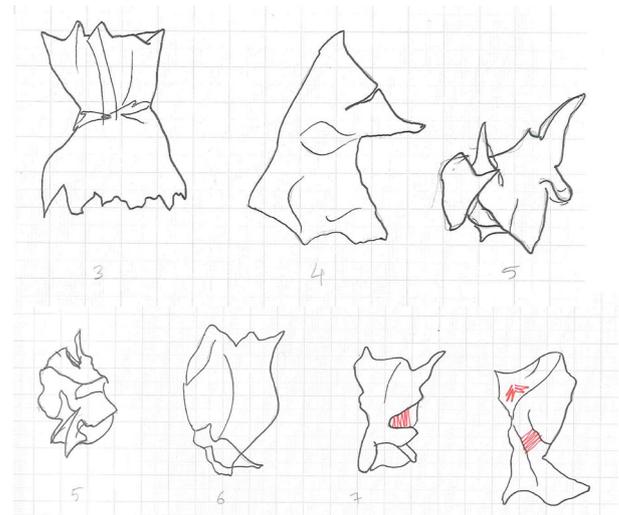


Figure 14: Diagrams showing the change in the forms of the newspaper step by step.

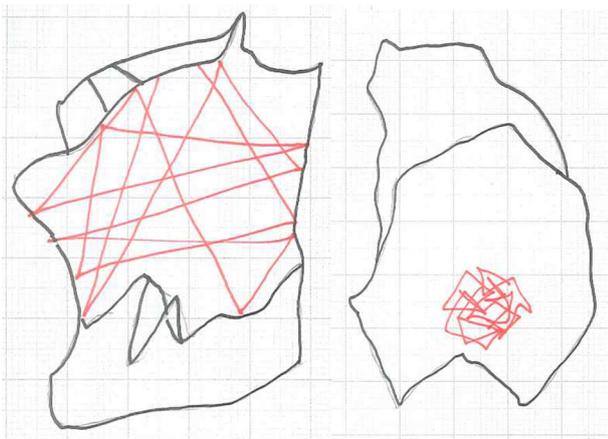
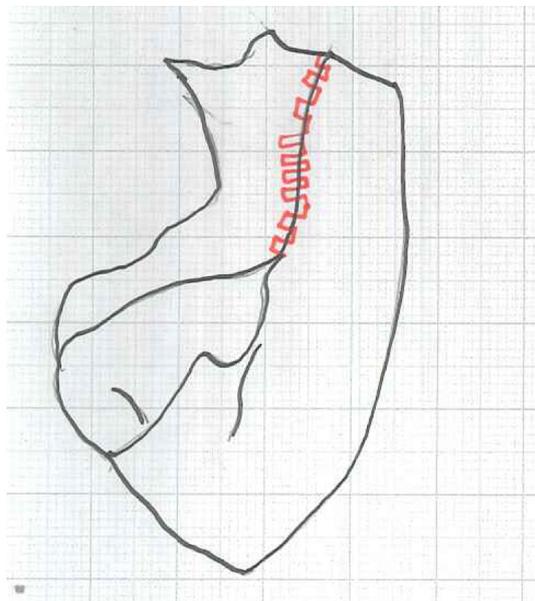
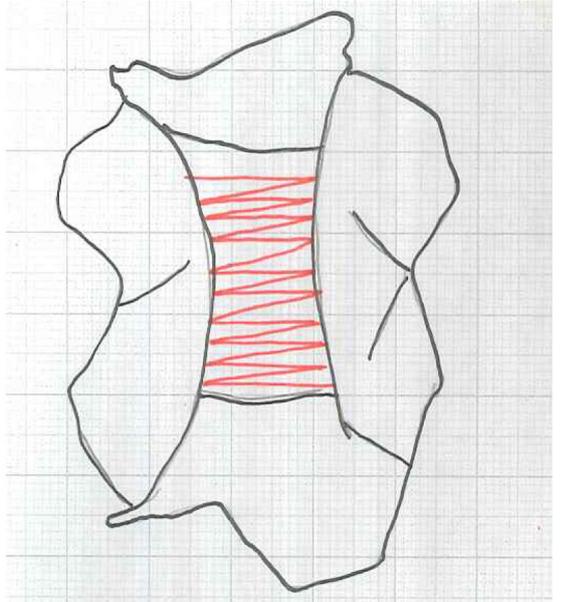
The stitching is based on changing the form, by turning the paper around and bringing the suitable corners together. We realized that the process involves two types of movements: a) continuous movement of wrinkled paper to find a spot for stitching, b) changing movement of the hand during stitching.

2) Size and shape of the final form: although the project is not form oriented most of the final pieces have similar sizes, and shape that each refers to the hand size of its maker.

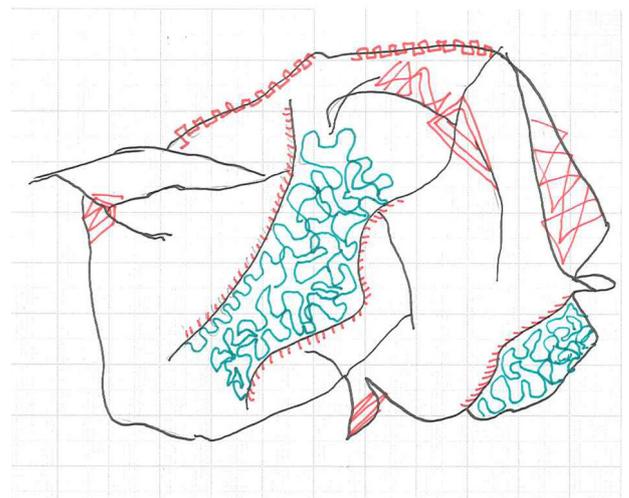
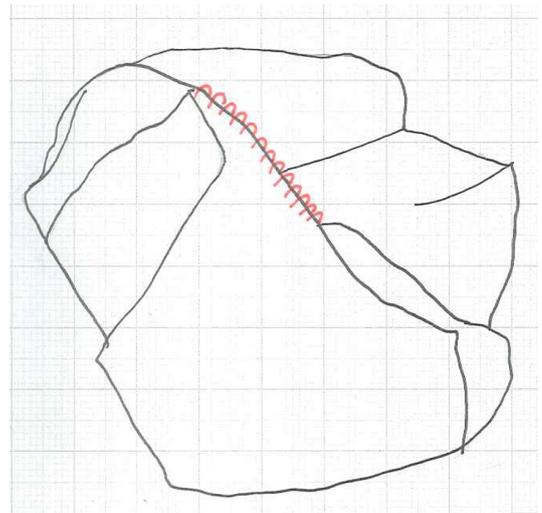
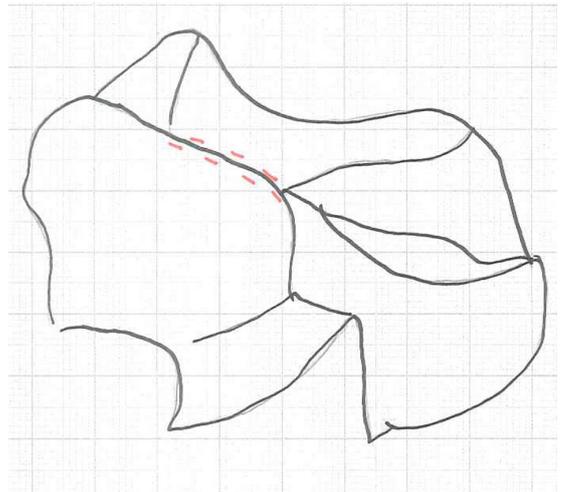
3) Styles of stitching: stitches are diverse in their styles and effects on the paper. We know the stitching types as these were told to us orally by family members or elderly people; they differentiate from each other according to their function. The visualization of stitching style on certain parts of the form is not only to decorate but also to create a change on the form. Therefore we decode drawings for stitching styles relevant to the change they create on the form.

4) Communication of diagrams: visualizing the process was a way of self-development that reveals the action and reaction of the wrinkling, stitching, and knitting. The process of visualizing forces us to re-call each step, before and after the transformation from a flat paper to a 3-d image.

The stitching types that were used in the project are satin, blanket, cross, and running stitches and we used them where appropriate according to their function.



Figures 15-16-17: Stitching types and their functions. Left column
 1. Type of Satin Stitch that brings the corners together. 2. Type of Blanket Stitch that brings the corners next to each other. 3. Types of Cross Stitch that holds the corners together or decorates.



Figures 18-19-20: Stitching types and their functions. Right column:
 1. Running Stitch that brings the corners next to each other - less tight.
 2. Threaded Running Stitch that brings the corners next to each other - less tight. 3. Look of the newspaper with sewed knitted pieces .

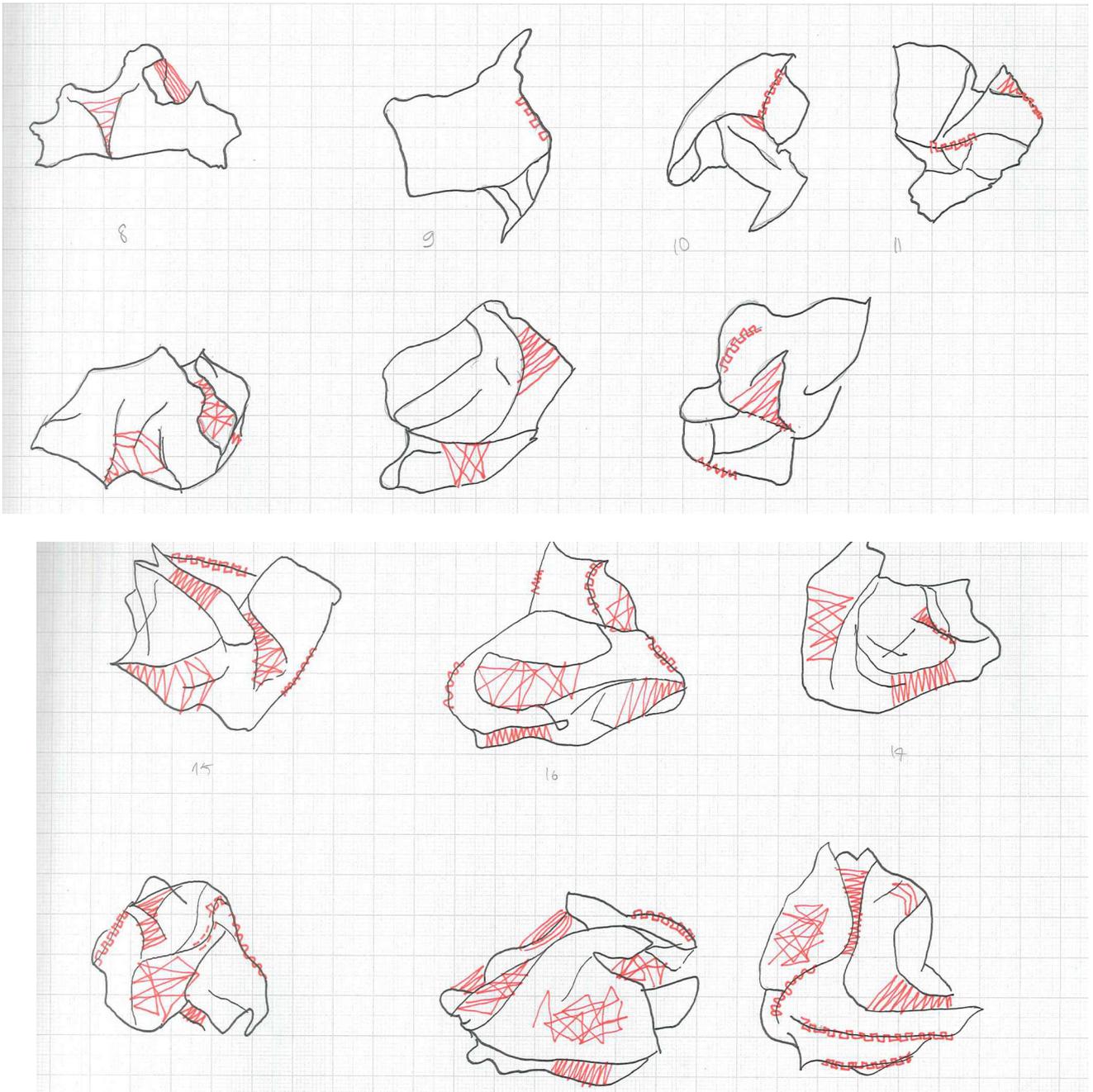


Figure 21-22: The evaluation of the form is arbitrary and varies in each piece. Since the paper is thin it allows the maker to shape it easily.

4.CONCLUSION AND FURTHER WORK:

In this project, we explore ways to develop a visual language for intangible cultural heritage objects to sustain knowledge and experience. Although the visible scope of this project is the objects themselves, indeed the project hints at the social background involved as we tried to hold all of its components together respectfully.

Drawing diagrams to narrate the process was successful for our internal communication; it helped for reasoning out the acts and for observation related to changes in form. However, to spread the idea of revival, the project will be turned into a participatory project that welcomes

people from various cultural experiences. In order to create a common language, diagrammatic drawings may be used to communicate with the participants/makers and to explain the process to them. Yet, this particular project is experiential and responsive, meant to give insight to the participants about the process of making. Instead of completely explanatory diagrams, we include blurry ones as well to give the participant freedom of interpretations. Despite diagrams are used to decode the uncertainty of the making process the finished diagrams may create boundaries to practice paper stitching and may lead audience to repeat the same wrinkled and stitched forms. The amateur look of early diagrams is directive rather than dictative which hopefully encour-

age audience to approach with a similar sense but with their personal perceptions. By doing so, practitioners will experience the randomness and intuitiveness of handicrafts but they will also be able to benefit from the guides if they need to.

As Foucault points out, all types of relationships involve conflicts (1980) and these clashes may be useful for development. Non stable and uncertain conditions provoke craftspeople, designers, heritage experts, and entrepreneurs for creative studies to remove the conflicts and bring new ones. This project may downscale the market disruption of handicrafts by raising awareness and encourage existing and potential makers for further attempts to maintain the culture.

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Figure 23: Further step: Participatory workshop organized in public spaces.

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