

Reviving Traditional Crafts as Entrepreneurial Projects:
*The Role of Entrepreneurial Education in the University Environment***Chtioui Hadjer*** University of Djelfa (algeria)
youhadjer17@gmail.com**ARTICLE INFO**

Received: [15/12/2025]

Accepted: [22/12/2025]

Published: [30/12/2025]

Keywords:

Traditional crafts;

Entrepreneurship;

Entrepreneurial education;

University activities; Algeria

Pages: [43–49]**Online access via QR code****ABSTRACT**

Traditional crafts are a vital part of cultural heritage and collective identity, but they face growing threats from industrial manufacturing, globalization, and a diminishing interest among young people. In Algeria, this scenario prompts critical inquiries regarding the future of traditional crafts and their ability to adapt to modern economic trends. This article seeks to examine how entrepreneurship contributes to revitalizing traditional crafts as business ventures, emphasizing the impact of entrepreneurial education and university initiatives in influencing students' entrepreneurial mindsets. Using a descriptive analytical method, the research relies on field data gathered via a questionnaire distributed to a sample of university students focusing on the sociology of organization and work. The results show that entrepreneurial education in the university setting plays a crucial role in increasing awareness of entrepreneurship, improving entrepreneurial skills, and motivating students to view traditional crafts as potential entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, university events like clubs, workshops, and entrepreneurial activities contribute to nurturing an entrepreneurial culture and aiding innovative projects tied to traditional crafts. The research concludes that incorporating traditional crafts into business models offers a valuable route for sustainable growth, merging economic value generation with the conservation of cultural heritage.

1. Introduction

Traditional crafts constitute far more than mere economic activities or functional objects; they represent the tangible and intangible expression of a community's cultural identity. As Sennett (2008) profoundly argues, the craft embodies a "dialogue between concrete materials and the human imagination," embedding techniques, aesthetics, and deep social meanings that have been accumulated, refined, and transmitted across generations. In sociological terms, crafts operate as "cultural infrastructures"—sustaining local histories, fostering community pride, and anchoring collective memory in a rapidly changing world. However, the relentless forces of globalization and the ubiquity of mass production have increasingly challenged the survival of these craft traditions. The industrial logic of standardization and efficiency has lowered the market competitiveness of handmade production, while simultaneously weakening the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission that once kept these skills alive. UNESCO's extensive work on intangible cultural heritage underscores that traditional craftsmanship is particularly vulnerable in this era; artisans often struggle to adapt to the influx of cheaper, mass-produced alternatives and the shifting, often volatile, preferences of modern consumers.

In the context of Algeria, these cultural and economic pressures intersect with urgent national aspirations for economic diversification, employment creation, and youth empowerment. As the country seeks to move beyond

its reliance on hydrocarbon revenues, the "new" economy offers a potential space for the "old" ways of production to be revalorized. Within this socio-economic landscape, entrepreneurship has gained significant prominence not merely as a business tactic, but as a comprehensive development strategy. Concurrently, universities are increasingly expected to transform from ivory towers of purely theoretical instruction into dynamic hubs of skills formation, innovation support, and employability enhancement. This shift places the university at the heart of a potential social renaissance for traditional crafts.

Recent scholarship by Kheiri Nouh (2025) provides a critical sociological lens for this transformation, emphasizing entrepreneurship as a social practice that produces new social links and future-oriented projects. This perspective becomes highly relevant when considering the "re-socialization" of crafts into modern markets. It suggests that entrepreneurship is not just about starting a company; it is about re-integrating marginalized cultural forms into the fabric of contemporary economic life.

This article investigates the multifaceted role of entrepreneurship—specifically entrepreneurial education within the university environment—and its potential to contribute to the revitalization of traditional crafts through entrepreneurial initiatives. By analyzing the perceptions and intentions of university students, this study aims to bridge the gap between cultural heritage preservation and modern economic imperatives. It addresses two primary research questions:

1. To what extent can entrepreneurship support the revitalization of traditional crafts as viable business ventures in the Algerian context?
2. How do university courses, pedagogical methods, and entrepreneurial activities shape students' attitudes, intentions, and perceptions regarding craft-based entrepreneurship?

2. Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Education: A Sociological Framing

2.1 The Concept of Entrepreneurship: Beyond the Economic

Entrepreneurship is conventionally defined as a process through which individuals identify opportunities, mobilize resources, and create value through innovative ventures while managing uncertainty and risk (Drucker, 1985; Hisrich et al., 2017). While this definition captures the functional mechanics of the market, it remains insufficient for a sociological analysis. From a sociological perspective, entrepreneurial action is deeply embedded in, and shaped by, the social fabric. It is influenced by institutions (rules, norms, and market structures), cultural meanings (the prestige associated with specific types of work, societal attitudes toward manual labor), and social networks (access to information, mentorship, and legitimacy).

In the Algerian context, where the "rentier mentality" has historically devalued private sector initiative in favor of public sector employment, the very act of becoming an entrepreneur is a significant social deviation. Nouh et al. (2022) argue that entrepreneurship's societal role extends far beyond economics; it serves as a mechanism for social integration and a vector for development trajectories. This argument is particularly salient when studying traditional crafts. Craft entrepreneurs often face a double challenge: they must navigate the rigorous demands of creating a sustainable business model while simultaneously preserving the "perceived authenticity" that gives their product value. Therefore, the entrepreneurial task includes economic work (pricing, production planning, market access) and significant symbolic work (storytelling, heritage framing, trust building). The craft entrepreneur is not just a seller of goods but a curator of cultural memory.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Education in the University Environment

Entrepreneurship education (EE) refers to structured learning experiences aimed at developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and mindsets. These include opportunity recognition, creativity, project management, and risk assessment (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). However, the sociological impact of EE lies in its ability to alter the "habitus" of students—the deeply ingrained dispositions and perceptions that shape their behavior. In a society where traditional crafts may be viewed as outdated or "low-status" manual labor, EE has the potential to reframe these activities as "innovation-ready" ventures.

In universities, entrepreneurial education typically operates through two distinct but interconnected channels:

- **Formal curricula:** This includes dedicated courses, modules, and project-based assignments that provide the theoretical underpinnings of business and management.
- **Co-curricular and extra-curricular pathways:** This encompasses clubs, bootcamps, workshops, competitions, mentoring sessions, and incubators.

For craft-based entrepreneurship, the most impactful learning environments are often those that are experiential. Passive learning in a lecture hall may convey the *theory* of marketing, but it cannot teach the *practice* of value attribution in a handmade rug or a piece of jewelry. Prototyping, market testing, customer discovery, branding practice, and legal/administrative simulations constitute "situated learning" where students acquire knowledge by doing. Such pedagogical interventions can shift students' perceptions of crafts from "traditional/manual" activities—associated with the past and the rural—to high-potential micro-ventures that can scale through quality differentiation, design, digital marketing, and niche market strategies.

3. Traditional Crafts as Entrepreneurial Projects: Analytical Perspectives

3.1 Traditional Crafts: Characteristics and Socio-Cultural Challenges

Traditional crafts are characterized by specialized hand skills, the use of local materials, and a form of knowledge that is deeply "embodied"—embedded in practice rather than formal documentation (Sennett, 2008). They often operate on small scales and rely on apprenticeship-like transmission, where mastery is achieved through repetition and observation. This mode of knowledge transfer is intimate and social, yet it is fragile. UNESCO notes that globalization and mass production can undercut handmade craftsmanship by offering cheaper alternatives, leading to a break in the chain of transmission as artisans' children seek more "modern" employment.

From a sociological standpoint, the challenges facing the craft sector in Algeria are structural as much as they are economic:

- **Market access constraints:** Artisans often remain weakly integrated into modern distribution channels. They lack the branding systems and digital literacy required to compete in a globalized marketplace.
- **Business capability gaps:** There is often a severe lack of training in essential business skills such as costing, pricing, accounting, and market segmentation. Many artisans rely on informal, often predatory, intermediaries to sell their goods.
- **Legitimacy and status issues:** In a society that often equates social success with white-collar

employment in the state sector, manual work can be undervalued. This status issue discourages youth engagement, as crafts may be seen as a fallback option rather than a career of choice.

- **Resource constraints:** Difficulty accessing finance, equipment, and stable supply chains hinders the scaling of production, even when demand exists.

3.2 Integrating Traditional Crafts into Entrepreneurship: A Policy and Strategy Approach

Transforming crafts into entrepreneurial ventures requires a rethinking of both production and market strategy, all while safeguarding cultural integrity. Entrepreneurial approaches can support crafts through several strategic avenues:

- **Value proposition redesign:** This involves linking authenticity to modern use cases, such as functional design or contemporary aesthetics. It is about making the "traditional" relevant to the "modern" consumer without stripping it of its identity.
- **Quality and standardization:** Improving consistency while preserving the artisanal identity is a delicate balance. Standardization is required for trust in e-commerce, yet over-standardization can destroy the unique value of the handmade.
- **Market expansion:** Digital channels, tourism markets, diaspora markets, and specialized niche segments (e.g., ethical fashion, sustainable interiors) offer new frontiers for craft entrepreneurs.
- **Institutional support:** Incubators, clusters, and business development services tailored to the specific needs of artisans (e.g., flexible hours, respect for production cycles) are essential.

Macro-level policy frameworks in Algeria, such as the National Agency for Support to Entrepreneurship Development (ANADE), emphasize SMEs and entrepreneurship as engines for employment and productivity. This aligns with positioning craft ventures as micro-enterprises and local development drivers. Within universities, entrepreneurial education can work as a "translation mechanism" that converts cultural resources (craft heritage) into economic opportunities (sustainable ventures) without reducing crafts to mere commodities. It teaches students how to navigate the tension between the logics of culture (preservation, slowness, uniqueness) and the logics of capital (growth, efficiency, replication).

4. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design to examine the complex relationship between entrepreneurial education and the perceived revitalization of traditional crafts. The objective is not merely to describe the surface-level intentions of students but to analyze the underlying sociological factors that influence their willingness to engage with craft-based entrepreneurship.

4.1 Participants and Procedure Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of Master's students in the field of organizational and work sociology at Ziane Achour University of Djelfa, Algeria (N = 33). The choice of sociology students is theoretically significant, as these students possess the analytical tools to understand the social dimensions of work and heritage, potentially making them more sensitive to the socio-cultural value of crafts than the average business student.

4.2 Instrument The questionnaire was designed to capture both demographic variables and psychometric

constructs related to entrepreneurship. It included three distinct sections:

1. **Demographics:** Information regarding gender, age, and prior exposure to crafts or entrepreneurship (e.g., family background in artisanal work).
2. **University Influence on Craft Revitalization:** Items assessing the impact of courses, workshops, clubs, and incubator exposure on the student's perception of crafts as a business opportunity.
3. **Entrepreneurial Identity and Intention:** Measures of self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed), opportunity recognition, and the perceived feasibility of craft ventures.

4.3 Data Analysis Given the exploratory nature of this research and the limited sample size, which restricts the generalizability of the findings, data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The analysis focuses on identifying patterns and trends within this specific cohort, interpreting them as indicative of broader sociological phenomena rather than definitive statistical proof. Qualitative interpretation of the quantitative trends is prioritized to provide depth to the findings.

5. Results and Discussion: A Sociological Interpretation

5.1 The Sample Profile and Gender Dynamics The demographic composition of the sample provides a starting point for analysis. As shown in Table 1, the sample consists of 19 males (57.6%) and 14 females (42.4%).

Table 1. Sample distribution by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	19	57.6%
Female	14	42.4%
Total	33	100%

From a sociological perspective, this distribution invites reflection on the gendered nature of craft production in Algeria. While certain crafts (like carpet weaving or pottery) are historically associated with women, and others (like leatherwork or metalwork) with men, the *business* side of crafts has often been dominated by men who control the commercial networks. The relatively balanced gender distribution in this study suggests that the "entrepreneurial" dimension of crafts is becoming gender-neutral within the university setting. However, whether this translates into equal opportunity in the actual marketplace remains a question of structural inequality. The female students' willingness to engage in entrepreneurship, as reflected in their presence in the sample, may indicate a desire to reclaim agency over the commercialization of traditionally feminine cultural forms.

5.2 University Influence and Attitudinal Shifts Overall, respondents expressed a distinct interest in entrepreneurship and tended to view traditional crafts as culturally valuable and potentially viable economic projects. This positive correlation aligns with the argument that entrepreneurial education can influence attitudes and intentions by reinforcing the perceived feasibility and desirability of self-employment pathways (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

The data suggests that students who reported active participation in entrepreneurship courses and university activities exhibited a heightened awareness of project development steps—ideation, feasibility, planning—and were more attentive to regulatory considerations. This supports the hypothesis that formal education acts as a catalyst for "cognitive mobilization." It equips students with the mental categories to look at a woven basket or a piece of jewelry and see not just an object, but a business model involving raw materials, labor costs, branding, and profit margins.

Furthermore, the qualitative feedback inferred from the study highlights the critical role of clubs and entrepreneurial events. These provide "situated learning" environments—networking opportunities and practical exposures that function as informal incubators. They complement classroom instruction by offering a taste of the "real world" risks and rewards. In the Algerian context, where the fear of failure (and the associated stigma) can be high, these safe spaces for experimentation are crucial for building resilience and "entrepreneurial self-efficacy."

5.3 The Negotiation of Structure and Agency: Nouh's "Call of the Ship" From a deeper sociological angle, craft entrepreneurship can be interpreted as a continuous negotiation between structure and agency. Students in the study demonstrated agency—the motivation and intention to pursue craft projects. However, they were acutely aware of structural constraints: financing difficulties, opaque market access, and the lingering social stigma attached to manual work.

Kheiri Nouh's (2025) concept of entrepreneurship as a "Call of the Ship" is particularly illuminating here. Nouh examines how entrepreneurial initiatives can offer ground-level solutions that sometimes outperform distant planning mechanisms. In the context of Algerian crafts, top-down state planning has often struggled to revitalize the sector due to bureaucracy and a lack of local specificity. In contrast, the "ship" of the individual entrepreneur—navigated by a student or young artisan—can maneuver through these obstacles with agility. The findings suggest that students are increasingly viewing themselves as captains of these ships, using the tools of modern entrepreneurship (digital marketing, design thinking) to navigate the treacherous waters of the global market.

The study reveals that while students value the cultural heritage (structure), they are willing to adapt and modify it to fit modern tastes (agency). This tension is productive; it is the engine of innovation. However, it also raises ethical questions about the commodification of culture. The sociological role of the university, therefore, is to ensure that this entrepreneurial agency is exercised with a reflexive understanding of cultural value, preventing the erosion of heritage into soulless souvenirs.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This article has examined how entrepreneurship—particularly university-based entrepreneurial education—may contribute to revitalizing traditional crafts as entrepreneurial ventures in Algeria. By shifting the focus from crafts as mere "manual labor" to crafts as "cultural capital" and "economic opportunity," it is possible to reimagine the role of artisans in the modern economy.

The findings, derived from a sample of sociology students, suggest that universities can act as powerful catalysts for reconnecting craft heritage with contemporary economic structures. By offering skills-oriented training, experiential activities, and supportive initiatives, higher education institutions can alter the habitus of students, fostering a generation that views tradition not as a burden, but as a reservoir of innovation.

Revitalizing traditional crafts through entrepreneurship contributes to economic opportunity and employment while strengthening cultural heritage preservation. However, achieving this requires more than just teaching business basics; it requires a holistic approach that addresses the sociological barriers of status and legitimacy. Accordingly, policy and practice should emphasize the following:

1. **Experiential Entrepreneurship Education:** Curricula must move beyond theory to include project-based learning tied to real craft markets. Students should work alongside actual artisans to solve real-world business problems, bridging the gap between the intellectual and the manual.
2. **Craft-Oriented Incubation:** Universities and agencies should establish incubators specifically designed for the creative and cultural industries. These would provide mentorship in prototyping labs, market access support, and intellectual property rights education tailored to traditional designs.
3. **Multi-Actor Collaboration:** Sustainable revitalization requires a "triple helix" of collaboration between universities, artisan associations, and government support agencies. This ensures that the "agency" of the entrepreneur is supported by the "structure" of policy and funding.

In conclusion, future of Algerian crafts lies not in freezing them in the past, but in weaving them into the fabric of the future. Entrepreneurial education provides the loom for this weaving, offering a pathway for young Algerians to build sustainable livelihoods while keeping their cultural heritage alive and vibrant. As Nouh (2025) suggests, the ship of entrepreneurship calls not only to those seeking profit, but to those seeking to construct a new social reality—one where tradition and modernity coexist in a dynamic, value-creating equilibrium.

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