

The Artisan Economy

Quotes taken from Brew to Bikes: Portland's Artisan Economy by Charles Heying

Qualities of Artisan Products

Handmade - "Artisan products integrate design and production, intentionally reveal the touch of the maker, and honor the inherent qualities of the material being shaped ...Obsessive uniformity is not the goal; the goal is to make a product where design incorporates and reveals the producer and her mastery of the process." (p. 41-42)

Authentic - "Authenticity implies wholeness or oneness, parts wholly integrated, the whole, one with purpose. Not only must the details be right, but they must be coherent and rightly situated. It is a kind of aliveness, not beauty in a universal sense, but truthfulness." (p. 42)

Designed to age - Artisan products get better with use and wear. "...artisan wares embody a narrative of use through the vital evidence of their slowly accumulating change. Patina is created slowly, imperceptibly, deeply. It is not about what's on the surface, but how age has gotten into the surface." (pg. 43)

Locally distinct - "What is locally distinct is not necessarily indigenous or derivative of elements of the landscape (that would eliminate the possibility of change and evolution), but it must become a part of the landscape. In a sense it must make its place, and its place must make sense." (p. 43)

Appreciated - "Artisan wares are appreciated rather than simply consumed...a loaf of artisan bread is appreciated. Eating the bread engages the senses in an experience of delight. Each loaf has a signature aroma and texture recognizable for the bakery that produced it." (pg. 44)

Egalitarian - "The material aspects of everyday life that are immediately accessible to the ordinary person—the food, music, films, household items, gardens, fashions, tools, and conveyances—all become objects of care and beauty in a wonderful fusion of art and utility." (pg. 44)

Artisan Work

Work as improvisation - "Artisan-training is a combination of apprenticeship, learning by doing, and skill sharing among a community of practitioners. Artisan skill is the accumulation of a bag of tricks, of knowing how and when to apply rules in a concrete situation." (pg.

Work as vocation - "Workers in the artisan economy are always on task but seldom at work. Work times are not fixed, rather they follow the requirements of the material, the rhythms of the project, or the flow of the season. Work follows the artisan around; it's an identity and a vocation...Exploitation in the artisan economy is often a form of self-

exploitation, an attempt to apply limited energy to the insurmountable opportunities of the craft.” (p. 45)

Combining working and living - This is about having working and living in the same place. Artisan work benefits from small, human scale places and schedules that can be flexible and social.

Organization of Artisan Work

Small-scale, high-autonomy, flexible specialization - They are generally small- and medium-sized firms, flatter and more horizontally organized, with higher levels of firm and individual worker autonomy. They are characterized by their responsiveness to new product needs. The particular advantage of artisan firms is their ability to assemble resources in a flexible way. The audacious artisan firm can scale up or down quickly to meet market demand and can adapt new market technologies.” (p. 46)

Art of assemblage- “The ability to assemble human, financial, and physical capital is remarkably fluid in the artisan economy...The particular skill of the artisan is in understanding how to mobilize these resources. The artisan economy is not an organization of command and control, but an organization of coordination, cooperation, and assemblage. It depends on social networks, trust developed through repeated interaction, participation in learning communities such as conferences, blogs, trade groups, and advocacy organizations, and being recognized in the small world of specialized suppliers and producers.”

Artisan clusters - “It is in the nature of the artisan work to create clusters of firms that elaborate product niches of taste, quality, distinctiveness, and service. Because of the unique quality of each product, it is more productive to create cooperative networks rather than to consolidate. For artisan firms, economies of scale are less relevant than flexibility, autonomy, creativity, and collaboration.”(p. 48) Instead of trying to handle things in-house, artisan firms look to their neighbor.”

Soft infrastructure and learning communities - "Artisans tend to be more open about sharing information and learning from others... For artisans, the additional transaction costs for working in a learning community are offset by the constant skill enhancement, currency of knowledge, access to resources, and pure fun of mobilizing the assemblage of networks.” (pg. 48-49)

Low barriers to entry - “Artisan enterprises seem first to appear in sectors that can be learned by doing (self-teaching, peer sharing, and apprenticeships), do not require difficult-to-attain professional licensure, have accessible production technologies and low-tech resource inputs, depend more on skilled labor than capital, and initially have minimal space needs that can be met by a variety of configurations. The low-rent storefronts and living spaces in declining areas of cities have been an important precondition for the emergence of neo-bohemian districts where artisans have thrived.” (p. 49)