

Reconnecting Communities through Craft

Intergenerational Learning and Cultural Sustainability in Hunza

Master's Thesis

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Preface

This thesis would not have been possible without the contribution of many amazing people, from the mountains of Hunza to Finland. I will carry this thesis as a part of myself forever, as this journey has brought me closer to my traditions and the community. Growing up in one of the most remote mountainous regions was not always easy, and back then I never realized the value of having a strong community and the traditions that surrounded me. Over time, however, this connection and pride became more visible to me, and since then I have never been able to separate myself from it. Along with this connection also came a growing concern about the social and cultural changes I have witnessed over time. This thesis is therefore my small contribution to expressing that concern and exploring future possibilities for cultural and social revitalisation.

First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank my dear supervisor, Maria Huhmarniemi, who has been a constant source of guidance and knowledge throughout these two years of my master's journey. I am also grateful to Elina Luiro and Villaino Team, with whom I got exposure to learn about wool crafts and become part of this community through the Crafts-based Product Design course.

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Abstract:

This research explores the idea of heritage revitalization and cultural sustainability through craft-based practices in the context of Hunza Valley, a district in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan known for its rich cultural heritage and strong community values. In recent decades, rapid development and modernisation have reshaped everyday life, contributing to the gradual decline of traditional practices, social connections, and cultural identity. The study investigates how crafts and shared values once supported a closely connected and socially sustainable community, and how these have changed over time. Using Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR), the research combines interviews, field observations, and a participatory workshop involving elders and children. Wool and thread-making practices were used as a medium to explore intergenerational learning, storytelling, and cultural exchange. The findings show that craft practices functioned not only as productive activities but also as important social spaces that enabled knowledge transmission and strengthened relationships. The research concludes that craft-based intergenerational activities can play a meaningful role in reconnecting communities and supporting cultural sustainability. The study highlights the potential of reinterpreting traditional practices to create new spaces for dialogue, learning, and social connection in contemporary contexts.

Keywords

Revitalization; Cultural sustainability; Intergenerational learning; Crafts; Social cohesion; Cultural heritage; Arts-based research; Community resilience; Hunza Valley

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Introduction

Global Cultural Transformations and the Need for Cultural Sustainability

Social values and cultural ethos are transforming globally and Human cultures are inherently dynamic and continue to evolve as societies experience economic and technological changes (Yeganeh, 2024, p. 1). Clammer discusses this transformation over the past four decades in particular, significant transformations have occurred in cultural attitudes related to religion, gender roles, power relations, minority rights, environmental awareness, and family structures. These shifts have been especially pronounced in Western societies, while Eastern societies have also been influenced, although often at a comparatively slower pace. Small and remote communities, which were once culturally strong and distinctive societies built on collectivist values, are also experiencing significant change. Many of these communities are gradually shifting toward more individualistic and fast-paced ways of life shaped by modern technology, economic development, and new social aspirations.

“Formerly a princely state, the district of Hunza covers an area of 11, 695 sq km” (Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, n.d.). It has a population of 65,497 people, according to the Planning and Development Department, Government of Gilgit Baltistan (2023). “It is home to a wide range of cultural heritage sites, including the famous Altit and Baltit Forts, historic polo grounds, watchtowers, mosques, and several archaeological sites such as the renowned Sacred Haldekish Rocks in Ganish” (Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, n.d.). Hunza possesses a unique and ancient cultural heritage. In recent years, it has also emerged as one of the most beautiful valleys and a major tourist attraction globally. As the global tourism industry expands, the climate continues to warm, and increasing globalisation threatens to blur cultural differences. A similar transformation is occurring in Hunza. Mass tourism, economic development, and consumerism are rapidly changing the region, and in the process of becoming an educated and progressive society, Hunza is gradually losing the essence of its traditional values, customs, and cultural practices.

Climate change has also affected the region significantly, during the summer of 2025, heavy floods caused widespread destruction, resulting in the loss of homes, land, and livelihoods. As I was present in the region during that time, I witnessed some of the impacts myself. Local residents reported that it was one of the most severe flooding events in recent history, and similar concerns were widely expressed on social media by people from the region. These issues like climate change, tourism, and socio-economic transformation are broad and complex. It is therefore not possible to address all of them within a single study. For this reason, this research focuses specifically on cultural and social revitalisation as a way of supporting cultural sustainability.

A.W. Khan (2020) highlights the factors that contributed to the erosion of cultural values among the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, including the decline of ecological and cosmological customs and traditions. Living in a mountainous environment, communities traditionally held a deep respect for nature. They also celebrated a rich variety of festivals that fostered social cohesion. However, following the Partition of India, the region became disputed between two states. Khan argues that the Pakistani colonial education system further contributed to the gradual disappearance of local culture, traditions, and rituals.

Globally, societies are undergoing significant transformations driven by factors such as climate change, globalization, economic integration, migration, and rapid advances in information and communication technologies. These changes have also increased the need to understand the role and significance of cultural heritage. Heritage is widely regarded as a crucial component of sustainable development, and there is broad consensus that it should be both protected and used in a sustainable way (Albert, 2015, p. 15).

Similar concerns have been raised in other regions of the world. For example, researchers here in the Arctic have noted that;

Globalisation has also resulted in a shift from rural to the urban in terms of economic activity, livelihoods and cultural life. This process is complex, changing cultural and locational identities and challenging the well-being of the population, regional

development and the vitality of cultural heritage among local cultures. Furthermore, although the ongoing societal and environmental changes are fast and unpredictable, the importance of local cultures for development has been recognised (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020, p. 2).

In another research “Communities in the Arctic face climate change and exploitation of natural resources, which have cumulative impacts on culture. Moreover, the youth living in villages in the Arctic, similar to all peripheral places, commonly have to leave to continue their education in larger cities. This situation leads to distortion of social structures and cultural disintegration of small towns and villages” (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2018, p. 02). When I compare these discussions in the context of Hunza it has been facing the same issues in the last two decades but it becomes clear that awareness of cultural sustainability is still limited in that region. While many changes are visible in everyday life, there has been relatively little discussion about the long-term cultural consequences of these transformations.

This highlights the need to initiate conversations about cultural sustainability and to recognise the importance of local traditions and cultural practices within the community. “Revitalisation is described as a practice that renews and remakes cultural traditions that are part of the social construction” (Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2020, p. 11). “Recreating old handcraft traditions with contemporary art methods both revitalizes and reconstructs culture” (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2018, p. 01) and reconnecting younger generations with their cultural practices can help bridge the growing gap between past traditions and present lifestyles (Good, et al., 2021, p. 589). Good (2021) also explores how Indigenous youth reconnect with their cultural identity through traditional music programs.

Culturally appropriate strategies are best for healing and promoting well-being, both at the individual and community level. Arts-based healing techniques are an excellent example of applying culturally appropriate strategy. These techniques provide an opportunity for individuals to reconnect with their culture and encourage self and cultural expression (p. 589).

Cultural activities in this context do not only involve learning material crafts; they also include storytelling, conversations, and interactions across generations, through which knowledge, memories, and cultural values are shared and preserved. “Traditional local knowledge and skills with long historic roots ought to be recognised as a valuable form of cultural heritage for contemporary culture. Cultural renewal and reconstruction should also be supported according to the guidelines of culturally sustainable development” (Härkönen, et al., 2018, p. 02).

Hunza in Transition: Heritage, Modernisation, and Changing Social Values

I base this research on comprehensive research data collected during my fieldwork and visits to the Hunza region. The research involved conversations and interviews with local residents as well as a workshop conducted with elderly women from the community and children from the village of Hyderabad in Hunza. My role as a researcher was to design the research process, plan the workshop, and identify relevant areas of inquiry. I was also responsible for establishing collaborations with local organisations in order to access local knowledge and build meaningful connections with the community. “The Karakoram Area Development Organization (KADO), a non-profit and the first community-based organization founded in 1996 in Hunza” (Karakoram Area Development Organization [KADO], n.d.), has played an important role during the data collection phase. KADO runs handicraft initiatives involving specially abled members of the community, and the organisation provided an important platform for initiating my research and for helping me engage more closely with the local community.

The aim of this research is to explore the forgotten values of the community that were once central to unity, compassion, and collective strength. Today, Hunza is widely recognised for several positive aspects, including one of the highest literacy rates in the country, its spectacular mountain landscapes, and its distinctive food and cultural traditions. As a result, both domestic and international tourists visit the region in large numbers every year. However, what visitors often experience is primarily the material and visual aspect of the culture, such as handicrafts, food, and scenic landscapes. The deeper social values and cultural meanings behind these traditions are rarely visible. Having been born and raised in Hunza, I have personally witnessed

significant social changes. My own life experience is very different from the life my father experienced during his childhood. Over the past two to three decades, the region has undergone major transformations, including the expansion of the education system, the growth of development institutions, increasing tourism, and the export of local products.

However, alongside these developments, community values have also shifted. People are no longer as closely connected as they once were. Children today are growing up in a very different social environment where they have fewer opportunities to learn about traditions, customs, and social values through storytelling, festivals, or everyday community gatherings. For this reason, this research is an effort to better understand the values that once helped keep the community resilient and socially connected for a long time. Engaging with local residents during the research process and spending time in the community was particularly meaningful for me, as these interactions offered many opportunities for reflection and learning.

More specifically, the research focuses on intergenerational relationships and social bonds. It explores how these relationships function today and how they existed in earlier generations. The research asks what role these connections played in the upbringing of children within a small community and how everyday practices contributed to maintaining these relationships. It also examines how traditional crafts, materials, and daily life in the mountainous environment helped sustain social cohesion and pass cultural values from one generation to the next. Historically, communities in Hunza were largely self-sufficient and relatively disconnected from the outside world, which led to the development of unique ways of life over centuries. Despite living in a region characterised by limited food resources, a fragile landscape, and frequent natural challenges, the people of Hunza managed to create a largely self-sustaining society that depended very little on external resources. Every member of the community contributed in some way, and responsibilities and resources were shared collectively. The techniques developed for food preservation, clothing production, and craft making were carefully adapted to survive the long and harsh winters of the mountains.

Reconnecting with Heritage through Wool

Another important aspect of this lifestyle was the strong social connection embedded within everyday cultural practices. Daily life involved working together, sharing knowledge, and learning directly from elders through participation. Craft practices such as wool processing, thread making, weaving, and basketry were not only economic activities but also important social spaces where people gathered, interacted, and spent time together. These practices allowed knowledge, values, and skills to pass naturally from one generation to another. Through my conversations with elders during this research, it became evident that such everyday activities played an important role in maintaining community bonds, cultural identity, and resilience within the harsh mountain environment.

My interest in wool as a revitalisation medium was also strongly influenced by my engagement with wool innovation projects in Arctic Finland, particularly through the Wool Innovation (VillaInno) project. Through this experience, I realised that wool can function not only as a material resource but also as a medium for rebuilding social interaction, cultural continuity, and sustainable thinking within communities. Similar discussions appear in Arctic research, where craft revitalisation is understood as a process that reconnects people with local knowledge and cultural practices. Huhmarniemi (2021) explains that “revitalisation can be intergenerational and intercultural, aiming to transfer local knowledge, artistry, and cultural practices to new generations and new community members”. Craft traditions, including knitting and wool-based practices, carry cultural memory and heritage through both symbols and making processes. Similarly, Hernández Cervantes and Huhmarniemi (2023) argues that “a culture’s soul can be seen through its craft,” while also emphasizing that heritage can continue and regain relevance through collaboration, co-design, and engagement with contemporary practices.

At the same time, wool-based traditions are facing challenges globally. Huhmarniemi et al. (2025) discuss how wool heritage crafts in rural Arctic regions are disappearing as local wool increasingly becomes treated as waste rather than a valuable cultural and ecological resource. Their research identifies how heritage craft knowledge and art education can support innovation and more ecologically responsible futures. These discussions strongly resonated with the

situation in Hunza, where traditional wool practices have also gradually declined despite wool once being central to daily life, clothing production, and survival in the mountain climate.

The findings of this research, based on interviews, conversations, and the community workshop, indicate significant social changes and shifts in traditional values. In particular, they highlight how the community system once functioned and how it influenced the upbringing of children within the community. The data reveals how earlier social structures supported values such as cooperation, mutual support, and collective responsibility. These values were reinforced through cultural connectors such as crafts, festivals, storytelling, and community gatherings. The research further demonstrates how wool-based activities can still create spaces for intergenerational interaction, dialogue, and cultural reflection. Rather than treating wool only as a traditional material, this research positions it as a medium through which cultural sustainability, social connection, and community awareness can be reactivated in contemporary contexts.

Research objectives, questions and methodologies

The main purpose of this research is to investigate how heritage and cultural values can be reinterpreted in contemporary contexts to support more sustainable communities. In order to do so, the research seeks to understand the current social situation and the challenges that arise from changing lifestyles. It also examines the relationship between modern ways of living and the gradual weakening of cultural and social connections within the community.

Research Objectives

- To investigate cultural heritage, social practices, and values that historically sustained community cohesion and ecological balance.
- To foster intergenerational connections through community-based workshops, dialogue, and shared cultural practices.
- To identify possibilities for reactivating wool-based crafts and related knowledge within a contemporary context.
- To engage the community and younger generations while creating awareness about cultural practices, shared values, and social change through organising the community workshop and producing a documentary film.

Questions:

- How have traditional craft practices and social values shaped community life in Hunza, and how have these changed over time?
- How can craft-based intergenerational activities, such as wool practices, help reconnect communities and support cultural and social sustainability today?

This research is an exploratory study aimed at understanding the connection between cultural heritage and social sustainability. To achieve this objective, the research combines different qualitative and arts-based research methods. I conducted interviews with social and historical experts from the community to enhance understanding about the local experiences and perspectives. These interviews provided valuable context for understanding the current social situation and the cultural transformations taking place in the region.

The overarching methodology of this research is Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR). As part of this approach, I organised a one-day community workshop designed to bring together multiple generations. The workshop aimed to recreate a shared social environment in which participants could reconnect with traditional community practices through craft activities related to wool. Historically, wool was widely used to produce essential clothing items such as gowns, caps, and socks to protect against the cold climate. The workshop included a practical component in which elders demonstrated traditional wool spinning practices, while younger participants had the opportunity to observe, interact, and experiment with the material themselves. However, the primary focus of the workshop was not only the craft technique itself but the social interaction surrounding it. The activity was designed to create an organic environment that encouraged dialogue, storytelling, and the sharing of past experiences. Participants discussed their memories, traditional festivals, challenges of earlier times, moments of happiness, and their connection to nature. Through these exchanges, the workshop became a space for collective reflection and intergenerational learning.

The artistic component of this thesis includes a short documentary film created by compiling footage from the interviews and the workshop conducted during the research. The film represents the connection between generations and highlights wool as a medium of craft and cultural expression. It reflects the interactions, conversations, and shared experiences that emerged during the workshop, illustrating how traditional practices can create spaces for dialogue and learning across generations.

In addition to the film, the artistic work also includes my own engagement with wool through the creation of a woven woollen scarf. This piece was developed during my three-month internship at Taito Lappi in Rovaniemi, where I practiced weaving and explored wool as a material. The final presentation of the project takes the form of an exhibition that brings together the film, the woven artifact, and visual documentation of the research process. Through these artworks, the exhibition reflects both my personal journey with wool and the broader research exploring cultural heritage and intergenerational connections.

Theoretical Background

Cultural Sustainability

In this chapter, I will explain the relative themes through different authors and researches already made. While moving forward I realised that to justify my problem statement I need to understand multiple thematic areas and to cover that I have divided them into three major categories and sub categories.

“The scientific discourse on cultural sustainability is organized around seven storylines: heritage, vitality, economic viability, diversity, locality, eco-cultural resilience, and eco-cultural civilization. These storylines are partly interlinked and overlapping” (Soini & Birkeland, 2014, p. 213). Although governments and non-governmental organizations increasingly acknowledge culture been an important dimension of sustainable development, culture has not been fully institutionalized within sustainability frameworks. “Compared to ecological, economic, and social sustainability, cultural sustainability has not been systematically integrated into development policies, practices, or evaluation processes” (p. 214).

“In many articles, the meanings of cultural sustainability were associated with and organized around a story line of cultural heritage” (p. 216). Tangible cultural heritage generally refers to the conservation of physical cultural elements such as historic buildings, monuments, and protected natural landscapes. In contrast, intangible heritage relates to the knowledge, practices, traditions, and skills that are associated with and give meaning to these material cultural forms (p. 216). “Cultural sustainability in this context is about striving for understanding of the communities and their places who collaborate in the working. One of the key principles is to recognise that the ownership of local knowledge and the planned activities need to be based on the need that originate from the people living in the area” (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 27). As a result, the concept of cultural sustainability remains in a process of development, leading to diverse interpretations and applications within academic literature (Soini & Birkeland, 2014).

Revitalisation of heritage

“The main challenge related to the conservation and preservation of heritage is derived from the increasing effects of globalization, namely human mobility (immigration and outmigration) and trade and their impacts on languages, ethnic heritage, identity, and the distinctiveness of landscapes” (Soini & Birkeland, 2014, p. 216). “Revitalisation does not mean returning to history, culture and identity that would be authentic or unmixed. Revitalisation is always based on an interpretation of history that changes according to our sources of historical knowledge, as well as personal and communal perceptions, judgements and values” (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020, p. 11). “Cultural heritage in cultural sustainability is focusing on the ways everyday life is lived in different places and what people value in their lives and places. This can enable a heritage-informed perspective on what should happen next, which could as easily be a decision to promote radical change as to encourage continuity” (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 29).

As John R. Clammer (2015) suggests, creative thinking is largely driven by artists, writers, theatre practitioners, and filmmakers, highlighting the key role of the arts in shaping society. He argues that positioning culture at the core of development—and recognizing the arts as fundamental to cultural expression—has significant implications for development practice, policy, and theory, while also opening up new possibilities for imagining future societies. Clammer further emphasizes that human culture is not something that can be abandoned or replaced; rather, it must be continuously reshaped from within. This process requires engaging with past knowledge and traditions while also responding creatively to contemporary challenges (pp. 20–22). “While the UNESCO program recognizes the intangibility of culture, it conceives of culture in tangible terms of safeguarding, preservation, exhibition, tourism, and commodification, sucking the life out of folklore” (Ben-Amos, 2023, p. 360).

Land-based learning and traditional knowledge

StollSørmo and Gårdvik (2022) explain the connection between culture and nature through the concept of ‘eco-culture.’ This form of knowledge encompasses traditional, ecological, Indigenous, tacit, and local understandings. Land includes water, earth, and air, and is perceived as both a living and spiritual entity that is continuously changing. “It refers not only to physical

locations and relationships with urban Indigenous landscapes but also to how discourses within these places shape and are shaped by our perspectives, pedagogies, and teaching practices” (Bowra et al., 2021, p. 01). Writer further explains,

In Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, Land is the basis of all life and therefore the foundation for all cultural and traditional teachings. Learning takes place in cooperation with the rhythms of everyday life, including land-based activities such as hunting and gathering. This form of education is in contrast with Western systems that continue to perpetuate colonialism through the erasure of Indigenous lives, cultures, and knowledge (Bowra et al., 2021, p. 01).

“To this day, Indigenous ways of knowing and learning continue to be marginalized in mainstream education because Eurocentric education systems fail to acknowledge Indigenous histories and non-Western ways of knowing, being, and learning” (Scully, 2012). Scully further explains, in the Canadian context, that understanding “Land as First Teacher” is essential to shaping perspectives on place and interconnectedness, and is central to what has been learned from Indigenous communities, educators, and scholars (p. 156). He also suggests that institutions must undertake both decolonization and re-education efforts to enable governments and citizens to engage with Indigenous peoples in more just and respectful ways in the future (p. 155). Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of experiencing places in non-conventional ways, noting that places serve as shared ground, and that a deeper understanding of place can transform one’s perspective (p. 152).

Nature can be understood as a source of ethical and ecological learning, offering an alternative to human-centered systems and reinforcing the need for its protection. In many Indigenous worldviews, learning occurs through close observation of land, seasons, and natural processes, demonstrating that knowledge is not limited to verbal or rational forms but is deeply experiential and relational (Gottlieb, 2015). This perspective aligns with the idea that land itself acts as a teacher. Unlike human societies, which are often shaped by exploitation and consumerism, nature reflects balance, continuity, and interdependence. As Gottlieb suggests, this contrast highlights why nature should be respected and protected, not only as a resource but as a guide for

more sustainable and ethical ways of living. Gottlieb also suggests that ideas about nature, even if sometimes conceptually complex or contradictory, fulfill a deep social and philosophical need. Nature is often imagined as a space less burdened by moral conflict, which is why it continues to serve as a source of inspiration, reflection, and guidance for human societies.

Cultural continuity through local crafts and practices

Jokela, Huhmarniemi and Hiltunen propose a plan about how culture can be revitalized in the communities of Arctic that AAE (Arctic Art Education) “activities should involve Elders, artists, craft makers, cultural leaders and local organisations to ensure that the lessons learned reflect community values and addresses significant issues, such as climate change, land rights and cultural preservation” (Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2025a, p. 24). “Preliminary knowledge of Northern ecoculture and material traditions should be ensured in collaboration with knowledge holders. This approach fosters active citizenship, strengthens cultural identity and facilitates the transfer of knowledge between generations, ultimately supporting a sustainability transformation” (p. 24).

Cultural heritage has often been understood as a basis of identity tied to a place-based sense of belonging, offering strong justification for preserving heritage for future generations. “Cultural sustainability refers to the process of recovering and protecting cultural identities, and it is closely connected to traditional practices through the celebration of local and regional histories as well as the transmission of cultural values across generations” (Soini & Birkeland, 2014, p. 216). “The handcraft-based contemporary art practices with place-specific intergenerational and intercultural approaches create an open space for dialogue where the values and the perceptions of cultural heritage can be negotiated. Cultural sustainability as a concept is place-specific. Each location needs to evaluate its own needs, rights, and responsibilities for more sustainable living; if provided from outside, it no longer serves the purposes of cultural sustainability” (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2018).

Cultural sustainability is dependent upon the locals’ [Aboriginals’] control over their intellectual property and cultural events. Therefore, community-based management and locals’ efforts to develop their own management plans are important for promoting not

only the survival of local or indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions but also for ecological and economic sustainability (p. 218).

In addition to this Clammer in his book also compares the secular education and significance of arts based education “approaching social justice issues through the arts proves highly effective, in part because it engages the emotions and sensory skills that are hardly utilized or encouraged in academic, textually based education” (Clammer, 2015, pp. 173–174). “Such an approach also encourages a sense of place, new modes of perception and the enhancement of older and taken-for-granted modes, teaches new skills and promotes often high-impact but nonverbal means of communication and consciousness raising” (pp. 173–174).

Teena Starlight and Ranjan Datta (2024) describe how respectful engagement within traditional cultural camps can foster purposeful connections between Indigenous and Western worldviews. In Indigenous research methodologies, cultural camps function as holistic and experiential spaces for learning and preserving traditional knowledge. Through the involvement of community Elders and Knowledge Keepers, along with storytelling and culturally grounded activities, these camps foster strong connections to land-based knowledge and support the transferring of intergenerational practices. The authors further highlight that incorporating cultural camps into research approaches enables “Indigenous communities to reclaim agency in shaping research narratives, ensuring that their knowledge systems, perspectives, and practices are represented with authenticity and respect” (Starlight & Datta, 2024, pp. 1–3).

Community and Intergenerational Relations

Intergenerational learning between elders and children

Larkin (2004) in his book *Intergenerational Relationships* examines family dynamics across different regions of the world, including Africa, India, and Europe. He argues that an intergenerational perspective is essential for helping societies respond to rapid and significant social changes that place pressure on families and communities. According to Larkin, intergenerational programs have the potential to strengthen both family structures and wider community relationships (Larkin, E. 2004, p. 205). Relationships, he suggests, “give meaning to human development and act as a “connective tissue” linking individuals with others and with

their broader ecology of home, neighborhood, and community, highlighting their importance in development. From birth onwards, the presence of older generations in a child's life contributes to community cohesion" (p. 154).

Resident grandparents, in particular, play a significant role in child development through caregiving responsibilities, guidance, and education, often transmitted through storytelling (p. 154). Larkin states that;

In the subsequent training, the child is trained through participation, whether it be hunting or cultivation, emulating older members of the community, always working together in peer groups that foster solidarity and brotherhood/sisterhood. This type of training also reinforces intergenerational interaction because, in all cultural practices, such as initiation, language arts and rites of passage, the youth is trained, apprenticed, and supervised by the older generation. This supervision and presence of elders gives the youth prestige and stability, and helps keep the community together (Larkin, 2004, p. 154).

"It is crucial to note that intergenerational programs and perspectives do not automatically transfer from one culture to another. Programs and perspectives must fit the community, its self-identified needs, and be delivered with sensitivity in concert with community values" (p. 206).

"Defining intergenerational needs and working beyond traditional assumptions about intergenerational relationships is a challenge for those who want to create and sustain programs. This is not a short-term issue, but one that will continue to present a challenge for decades" (p. 207).

"The involvement of locals in planning and decision-making that concerns their life and culture as well as a deeper understanding of local cultural practices. This presumes an intimate understanding of local ways of life and culture. Here, Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' and 'care' are considered useful research approaches for understanding the local way of life and for identifying intangible relationships and development considerations that are crucial to cultural sustainability" (Soini & Birkeland, 2014, p. 218). Other writers also suggest that;

Participatory and co-creative approaches are often recommended to ensure that the community's voice shapes not only the outcomes but also the process itself. Local artists and craftspeople can be engaged as part-time instructors, enabling students to learn directly from community-based knowledge holders. This approach supports cultural preservation and revitalization while recognizing local expertise. Outdoor activities, place-specific art and collaborative projects with local residents are central, encouraging direct engagement with the Land, water, plants, animals and seasonal rhythms through art-based methods (Jokela, Huhmarniemi, & Hiltunen, 2025b, p. 26).

Clammer (2015) also gives a new perspective to child's learning that "children (and adult learners) should be given a planetary vision as well as a local one in this globalized world and that the nurturing of creativity rather than stuffing with 'facts' (themselves often selected on a highly ideological basis) should be the goal" (p. 174–177).

Transmission of values, ethics, and collective wisdom

The discussion of values must be situated within the context of culture, as culture serves as a source of collective memory and social imagination. It acts both as a repository of historical experiences and as a key resource for envisioning and shaping humane and sustainable futures for our planet. Culture is not only a conceptual idea but also an important body of empirical evidence that reflects what exists and what is possible (Clammer, 2015, p. 4). Clammer further talks about importance of oral forms of traditions and says that; "these oral forms are important in themselves as cultural expressions (and as media of protest, humor and memory), but also as a main means by which the history of a community is kept alive and transmitted from one generation to the next, and in which history being structured in a particular way by the means of narrative exposition chosen, also is a structuring element in the organization of a society" (p. 50–51).

In discussing literature, Clammer points out that not all forms are written. Oral traditions continue to exist widely across the world, including in so-called "developed" societies, where poetry is often performed, recited, or transformed into song. These oral literatures take many

forms, some of which have been recognized by UNESCO as part of what is known as “The Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” (UNESCO 2003) (p. 161–162). It is therefore important to recognize that Indigenous cultural expressions rooted in local communities and practices play a vital role in transmitting social values. These traditions should be protected and sustained so they can be passed on to future generations and young learners. Clammer also states that “these forms of indigenous cultural expression are not only interesting in their own right, but also embody ecological wisdom, social knowledge and complex ways of interpreting and managing the external world and its inevitable problems” (p. 153–155). M. Ivery (2017) also emphasizes that the teaching of Indigenous languages should always remain connected to their rich cultural context. She argues that learning a language only through its grammar, without understanding its social and cultural meanings, can reinforce the damaging effects of colonization. Instead, recent approaches to language education highlight the importance of teaching language within its cultural and social context (Ivery, 2017, pp. 141–143).

Social Change & Shifts in Values

Impact of societal transformation on cultural practices

“Human cultures are inherently dynamic, undergoing continuous shifts in values, attitudes, and cultural norms as societies experience economic and technological change” (Yeganeh, 2024, p. 1). Even as societies move toward individualism and gender equality, an important question remains: do these transformations lead to a convergence of cultural values? (p. 1).

Yeganeh further explains the concepts of individualism and collectivism using Hofstede’s framework, describing an individualistic society as one in which personal interests shape individuals’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In contrast, collectivist societies are characterized by strong loyalty to family, work, and nation, which in turn influences attitudes and behaviors. In such societies, individuals are embedded within close-knit groups—often extended families—that provide protection in exchange for loyalty. Meanwhile, in individualistic contexts, social ties tend to be looser, and individuals are primarily responsible for themselves and their immediate families (Yeganeh, 2024, p. 3).

Globalization connects the world's peoples in ways that they become increasingly aware of each other's presence as they engage in trade, travel, communication, and other activities. Globalization is fueled mainly by modern capitalism and technological innovation in the West; it tends to spread modern cultural values, including individualism, the rule of law, gender equality, secularism, rationality, and democracy. However, the diffusion of modern values does not lead to convergence or homogenization of cultural values because many globalized cultural values and norms are incompatible with the recipients' cultures. The interplay between global and local cultures leads to a conflicting mix of traditional and modern values (Yeganeh, 2024, p. 12).

As Yeganeh notes, the process of cultural change is multifaceted and dialectical: while socio-economic development tends to shift values toward modernity, demographic pressures and migration can reinforce traditional cultural values (Yeganeh, 2024, p. 16).

Clammer (2015) argues that excluding the arts from development discourse creates a significant gap. The neglect of expressive cultural forms may contribute to the failure of many well-intentioned development initiatives, as they do not engage with people's emotional and cultural lives. This absence is also reflected in the often sterile and unattractive landscapes particularly urban ones produced by development processes. Furthermore, such development can lead to the erosion of organic cultures, diminishing cultural diversity in ways similar to the loss of biological diversity (Clammer, 2015, pp. 23–25).

The Role of Culture in Resilience and Transformation

Clammer (2015) emphasizes that culture has a central role in imagining and shaping sustainable and meaningful futures. He argues that cultural development should not be seen as separate from social and economic development, but as an essential part of it. This perspective opens up important possibilities for understanding how cultural practices can be revitalized without becoming disconnected from contemporary life. Rather than relying solely on conventional models of development, Clammer emphasizes the role of arts and creative practices in generating new ways of thinking and responding to social challenges. As he suggests, "After all, who is

doing the creative thinking if not the artists, writers, theatre producers and filmmakers?” Placing culture at the center of development, and the arts at the core of culture, has significant implications for how societies imagine and build their futures (Clammer, 2015, pp. 193–194).

At the same time, this discussion also raises critical questions about how culture is represented and preserved. Dan Ben-Amos (2023) argues that when cultural objects are removed from their original contexts and placed in museums, they lose their functional and symbolic meaning. Although museums attempt to preserve and present cultural heritage with care and contextual information, these objects can no longer operate in the same way as they do within living communities. In such settings, they become static representations rather than active elements of cultural life. This disconnection can lead to frustration among the communities to whom these objects belong, as their cultural symbols are often reduced to aesthetic or exotic displays rather than being understood within their lived, social, and spiritual contexts.

“The packaging of traditional culture for modern consumers deflates it from the symbolic values of these words and objects within their communities. When heritage begins, tradition ends. In this way, a society abdicates its collective social and cultural identity and turns itself into a staged show. There is no way but to conclude that with such a significant degree of separation, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not a mate for the discipline of folklore” (Ben-Amos, 2023, p. 348).

Together, these perspectives highlight an important tension within cultural sustainability: while preservation is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own. Culture cannot be sustained solely by protecting objects or documenting traditions; it must remain embedded within everyday life and social practice. This reinforces the need to move beyond static forms of preservation toward approaches that support the active continuation and transformation of cultural practices within communities.

Teena Starlight and Ranjan Datta (2024) emphasize that respect, responsibility, and ethical engagement are central to land-based learning, particularly when participating in Indigenous cultural camps. Being part of such learning journeys requires careful attention to intention,

reciprocity, and honoring Indigenous knowledge systems. The Indigenous educator explains that traditional cultural camps are spaces where stories, safety practices, and ways of relating to the environment are taught through lived experience. These camps are rooted in Indigenous ways of being and strengthen connections to land, language, ancestors, and knowledge systems. The educator emphasizes that respectful engagement supports cultural continuity, while colonial education has contributed to the loss of identity and disconnection from lived realities. They further note that by reconnecting with land-based learning, individuals can unlearn colonial perspectives, rebuild relationships, and engage more meaningfully with Indigenous knowledge systems (Starlight & Datta, 2024).

Along with social shifts one cannot deny the environmental crisis we are facing globally and many Indigenous cosmologies offer valuable ecological knowledge grounded in localized and sustainable ways of living that are closely connected to biodiverse and healthy environments (Demos, 2016). It is important to acknowledge the cultural traditions of communities that live in environmentally responsive ways and continue to reshape their practices within current geopolitical and ecological challenges, alongside their ongoing struggles for decolonization and cultural survival. This stands in contrast to much of Western modernity, which continues to drive the planet toward critical tipping points of anthropogenic environmental crisis (Demos, 2016).

Methodology Chapter

Arts-Based Action Research as Methodological approach

In this chapter, I discuss my research methodologies in detail. I primarily grounded my research in Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR), which allows for more experiential, participatory, and reflective research. “Commonly, artistic research is conducted on these issues and presented in the artworks. The objective of ABAR is fundamentally different; it aims to identify and distinguish problems at the local level and create solutions through artistic work. For example, objectives address community empowerment, social change, and an increase in environmental responsibility and the sense of community” (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2018, p. 04). To further get the insights, I used more Ethnographic inspired methodologies to collect and analyze the data. The goals of this research are not singular; rather, they involve multiple aspects of the social and cultural connections within society, especially in Hunza. Ultimately, the primary goal of the research is to revitalize both tangible and intangible heritage and traditions within a contemporary context. In order to get to this point, it has been extremely important for me to understand the layers of the traditions, lifestyle, community, and social values from the past and how it looked like before.

This method is also described as the way “art-based research methods are used to access experiential knowledge from participants that may not be captured through conventional spoken or written research methods. Our findings show that art-based approaches can bring, for example, the tacit knowledge of local communities into the research process and its data. In addition, research outcomes can be communicated through artistic means – in other words, through forms of expression that go beyond traditional written academic publications” (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025a, p. 59).

It is important to incorporate ethnographic methods in this research, particularly given my dual role as both a researcher and a local resident of Hunza. My own perspective and reflections form a significant part of the study. Therefore, I adopted a qualitative ethnographic approach and conducted interviews as a primary method of data collection. “Interviews have been an important alternative to anonymous surveys and questionnaires since they represent moments of direct

contact between researchers and informants and provide occasions to investigate people's perceptions of and reactions to issues in greater depth than when using quantitative tools" (Fina, 2020, p. 154).

The author further explains that the aim of ethnographic interviews is to understand the participant's point of view, their relationship to life, and their perception of the world. Early anthropological interviews ranged "from informal conversations with "natives" to more structured sets of questions focusing on particular cultural and linguistic practices. However, the central idea remained the same: interviews enable researchers to access the emic perspective of participants, that is, their own understanding of their social world and the relationships within it" (Fina, 2020, p. 156).

While I use ABAR as a major research methodology, I understand that it is inspired by ethnographic methods as this also includes my own observations, interpretations and reflections on the research. I will use ethnographic analysis to reflect on overall data gathered during social interactions and everyday practices I observed during the fieldwork. As a participant-observer and an artist-researcher who is part of the community, I will also reflect on my own position and experiences to better understand the social and cultural context.

In this research, I paid careful attention to ethical considerations at every stage of data collection and analysis. All participants, including elders, children, and other community members, were fully informed about the objectives of the research, the workshop activities, and how their contributions would be used, including audio and video recordings. I obtained both verbal and written consent from participants, and in the case of children, permission was also obtained from their parents or guardians. Participants were clearly informed about their right to withdraw from this research at any time, and that their personal information would be treated with confidentiality and respect.

Throughout the process, I made sure that consent was not treated as a one-time formality but as an ongoing and transparent dialogue. I explained the purpose of my research, the use of photography and filming, and the potential public sharing of the documentary in the local

language to ensure full understanding. This was especially important because the research involved visual documentation. Participants were given the space to ask questions, express concerns, and make informed decisions about their engagement. In many cases, they felt comfortable and positive about being part of the research. As people of Hunza are known for their strong sense of identity and resilience, many elders expressed pride and happiness while sharing their life experiences, memories, and knowledge. Their willingness to participate came from a genuine desire to share their stories and cultural values with younger generations and a wider audience.

I approached all interactions with respect for cultural norms, personal boundaries, and community values, ensuring that the research process remained sensitive, inclusive, and non-intrusive. My position as a member of the same community also required continuous self-reflection to stay aware of potential biases and power dynamics. This reflexive approach helped me maintain integrity in both the data collection and its interpretation, while ensuring that participants' voices were represented authentically and respectfully.

Data Collection Methods

My data comes from conversations informed by interviews and more informal discussions with community elders and local residents who hold strong opinions and are eager to contribute to the preservation of their traditions and to the workshop. Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2025a, p. 65) say that “the process is commonly documented using photographs, video recordings, sketches, plans, artworks and meeting notes that are systematically stored. Researchers may also interview participants or record various feedback and evaluation discussions. Arts-based methods and other qualitative methods can be combined, for instance, by using visual material to support and enrich discussions” (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025a, p. 65).

I conducted semi-structured interviews based on thematic areas with Mr. Imdad Ali, an 88-year-old resident of Hyderabad village in Hunza. He is a former teacher, retired army officer, religious scholar, historian with extensive knowledge of the region's heritage, community leader, and

writer. The interview was guided by a set of thematic questions related to Hunza; however, the discussion remained flexible and developed further based on his responses and reflections.

The research data also includes my personal notes, which consist of reflections and observations recorded during conversations with various community members. One such discussion was with Mr. Faheem Baig, who was working as a program coordinator with KADO. His perspective was particularly valuable because he has been involved in several community projects focusing on women artisans' empowerment, cultural promotion, and the inclusion of especially abled individuals within the broader community. I also had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Abbas Ali, the acting CEO of KADO, and his wife, who works in the education sector training teachers and developing educational materials. Their perspectives provided insights from a different angle, particularly regarding social development and education in the region. Together, these interactions enriched the research data through storytelling and lived experiences. Some of these conversations were recorded, while others were documented in notes and personal reflections, which I later articulated in my own words. These interactions collectively reflect both an ethnographic orientation and a qualitative research methodology.

The workshop conducted as part of this research can be described as an arts-based community research process, as it involved active participation from the community and used artistic practices such as wool spinning and storytelling as tools for interaction. On the day of the workshop, I worked with a team of six people, including myself. Two members were responsible for videography, while three volunteers assisted in managing the participants and organizing activities according to the plan. The participants included five grandmothers aged between 75 and 90 years and eight children between the ages of eight and twelve.

The data generated from this workshop includes photographs, video recordings, and my personal experiences and reflections. After the workshop, the children shared their thoughts about the experience, and the volunteer team also provided their observations. Throughout this research journey, I collected photographs, videos, and personal notes documenting my reflections and observations during the fieldwork. These materials form an important part of the analysis, as they collectively contribute to and are reflected in the final documentary film produced as part of this

study. In total, the data consists of approximately 40–50 photographs and videos in the local language, as well as around 15 pages of diary entries and field notes recorded during the research process.

Data Analysis with ABR and Thematic Narrative methodologies

As an artist-researcher, my role in the analysis is not limited to collecting and presenting data; it also involves interpreting the material through my own perspective and experiences. Over time, there has been considerable discussion in research about whether studies should strictly follow scientific methods or allow space for the researcher's own perspective and interpretation. In this study, I position myself within this space, where personal reflection and interpretation become essential elements in making sense of the collected data. Fina in her book chapter also discusses that "A second issue concerns whether the role of the researcher should be to act as a kind of 'voice of informants' or as someone who steps out of the fieldwork to provide their own interpretation" (Fina, 2020, p. 159).

"Thus, researchers tend to always see research interviews as co-constructed rather than as simply conveying the point of view of the interviewee and many stress the fact that research interview is an interactional event in its own right" (Fina, 2020, p. 163). As I was born and raised in this region, I carry an emotional and spiritual connection to this society. This closeness shapes the way I understand and interpret the data I have collected. Along with the knowledge gathered through this research, I interpret the material through my own experiences and personal understanding of the culture and community.

I believe that the process of researching is coming back to a perceived phenomenon and questioning it again and again. Scrutinizing the world and re-experiencing it. (Barone & Eisner, 2011). The art research may not happen in a very systematic way but artists carry out the research in a more fluid way which includes their own observations, experiences, and a unique approach to the arts research. This conclusion supports the idea that research can communicate meaning not only through its literal content, but also through subtle, metaphorical, and qualitative dimensions. This understanding is validating my idea of exploring my traditions and re-experiencing them by also engaging the community. Due to the nature of my data I need

multiple approaches to analyse the data as my data includes audio and video files, storytelling, personal observations and reflections during field research, and personal notes. It's rather difficult to analyse everything all together, that's why I will categorise the data into themes.

Arts-Based Research Analysis

Arts-based research is central to both the analysis and the outcomes of this study. Through the creation of a short documentary film, I bring together footage from the workshop and interviews. The workshop itself became an experimental space that enabled conversations, storytelling, and emotional connections across generations. In the film, I use visual storytelling, observational footage, and oral narratives to reflect on social values, heritage, and community relationships. By combining action, participation, and reflection, the film demonstrates how arts-based practices can support social sustainability and cultural continuity in Hunza.

In this analysis, particular attention is given to wool as a central medium that created a shared space of interaction and participation for both grandmothers and children. Wool functioned not only as a craft material but also as a cultural connector that encouraged dialogue and collective engagement. This perspective relates closely to the role of crafts in sustaining cultural heritage. Through analyzing the collected data, I identify moments and insights that highlight how craft practices contribute to cultural expression and community relationships. These observations help address the research question of how craft-based activities can contribute to the revitalization of cultural heritage.

As (Härkönen, 2021) also explains in her research; as the basis for ABAR “is about a process aiming to change and improve current situations. Development, admittedly, never ends but is an ongoing process. At its best, action research is a common learning process of the participants, the basic assumption of which is that learning is an experiential and reflective process” (p. 79). To understand social and traditional aspects of a society, I consider that ABAR as well as a contribution of ethnographic approach is required because this research is not only about data collection, but it was an effort to get more closer within the community to get a better understanding of specific cultural settings.

Qualitative Thematic and Narrative Analysis

To understand the collected data, I focus on identifying patterns and recurring themes across the audio recordings, video material, and personal notes gathered during the research. For this purpose, I apply a combination of qualitative thematic analysis and narrative analysis, structuring the findings around the four research objectives. The interviews were originally conducted in Burushaski (the native language of central Hunza) and later transcribed and translated into English. This approach allows me to examine both patterns and stories together rather than separating them. I do not treat the interviews and workshop interactions merely as data, but rather as living expressions of intangible cultural heritage shaped through memory, storytelling, and intergenerational dialogue.

This approach is also informed by ethnographic perspectives. Ethnographic methods are used not only to document communities and their cultures but also to understand through the voices and perspectives of the participants how the past connects to the present, how cultural practices carry deeper meanings, and what issues are significant for community members. “Moreover, ethnographic projects have futures; they can live on as archival collections, where patterns of change, connection, and continuity in communities through diverse voices and perspectives come into conversation with each other” (Stefano & Fenn, 2022, p. 15).

In this research, I review interview recordings, field notes, and personal reflections to explore themes related to past social values, the sense of cultural gaps felt by community members today, and the elements from the past that appear to be missing in contemporary life. These themes include community bonding, intergenerational learning, changes in family life, respect for nature, and the role of traditional crafts. To provide further context about the specific geographic region, I include selected archival photographs from the past to support this interpretation, along with more recent images captured by local artists. Together, these visual materials help illustrate the transformations discussed in the data and make the concerns raised in this research more visible and grounded in lived reality.

“A very important aspect in interviewing today is the centrality accorded to reflexivity and therefore to conscious reflection on ways in which the interviewer contributed to the construction

of data, on the relationship between interviewers and participants, on the ethical implications of using interviews and on the rights of interviewees” (Fina, 2020, p. 159). Alongside identifying themes, I pay close attention to the ways stories are told how they convey shared values, life lessons, and collective memory, and how elders describe changes in lifestyle and community relationships over time. Through this process, heritage can be understood not only as something preserved but also as something lived, spoken, and continuously passed on through everyday interactions.

In this research, I identified four major themes that consistently emerged from the data collected. These themes are closely aligned with the research objectives outlined in the introduction. The four themes are: community life and social bonds in the past; intergenerational learning and the importance of craft practices; cultural change and shifting social structures; and reviving crafts and rebuilding social connections. Each of these themes is explored in detail in the findings section, supported by evidence drawn from interviews, workshop interactions, and field observations.

Research Design and Fieldwork Approach

Entering the Community and Relationship Building

In the initial phase of my research although, I had planned the workshop and identified the practices I wanted to explore, I was not sure how I would execute them on site. My information was limited, and I did not know whether people were still practicing wool-related crafts or weaving fabric. I was also unsure about how the elder generation engages with these traditions today and which elders in the community would be the most suitable to interview. Another challenge was deciding the location for the research, as central Hunza alone includes more than ten villages.

The only connection I initially had was with a few people at KADO, where I had previously worked for a few months. With these questions and uncertainties in mind, I reached out to Faheem Baig, who has been working as a regional program manager at KADO for many years. Having grown up in Hunza and worked extensively with local craft traditions, he became an important guide during the early stage of my research. In this chapter, I explain my research process, including how I conducted interviews and organized the workshop, as well as how I gradually built connections and interacted more closely with the community.

In the summer of 2025, I travelled back to Pakistan during my vacation and spent around ten days focusing on my research. This time was dedicated to planning, meeting people, and conducting fieldwork. During the first few days, I focused on familiarizing myself with the local environment and understanding how things could practically work on the ground. Although I was familiar with the language and knew a few people, it was my first time conducting this type of research. Therefore, I spent time speaking with people, explaining my research, and sharing what I was planning to do.

My connections at KADO played an important role during this phase, especially Faheem Baig. I visited KADO to meet him and discussed my ideas, plans, and many questions about possible challenges. He helped me understand the ground realities of the community. For example, in the early phase I had planned to include traditional loom weaving in the workshop. However, he

explained the practical challenges of arranging a loom. He also introduced me to other people connected to craft practices, such as Sultan Azam, who manages the KADO *Sharma* Center for rug making, and Deedar Ali, who was formerly a fabric weaver and now runs a traditional craft shop.

These interactions gradually helped me build relationships within the community. One discussion often led to another, and eventually I connected with elders, grandmothers, children, and others who later became part of my research process. After spending time at KADO and speaking with several people, I decided to conduct the workshop and research in Hyderabad village. This location was practical because many of the contacts were already there, and KADO is located in central Hyderabad (*Chumarkhan*), which made it easier to organize the research activities.

Faheem also shared with me a list of elders from Hyderabad village who could potentially participate in the workshop, and he suggested the names of male elders who could be suitable for interviews.

Mapping Local Craft Practices and Contexts

Following this, I met Sultan Azam and discussed the possibility of arranging tools and materials such as weaving looms, traditional spindles, and wool. During this conversation, I learned that KADO does not have traditional weaving looms or the spindles historically used for wool spinning. At this point, it is important to explain the work carried out at the KADO *Sharma* Center. The center involves specially abled members of the community who often feel excluded from society. They receive training and work on producing *Sharma* (traditional rugs), ropes, and threads, mainly using goat hair rather than wool.

The tools and looms used in this process are different in both size and technique. In contrast, traditional fabric weaving required different types of looms and wool, where women in the community would spin the wool and a few men in the village would weave it into fabric. Since these practices are no longer common, it was difficult for me to find the original tools and wool needed for the workshop. After spending several days asking questions and learning more about

the situation, I began modifying my plan and clarifying what would be realistically possible for the workshop.

Designing the Intergenerational Workshop

My primary aim was to create a space where elders and children could come together and engage through traditional practices, especially wool spinning and storytelling. I received six potential names of grandmothers who had lifelong experience in wool spinning. During this process, I also met Afshan, a local resident of Hyderabad who works as an artisan at KADO in embroidery and textiles. She helped me connect with the grandmothers and introduced me to them, as she knew them personally along with their families and locations.

Together, we visited each grandmother one by one and I also captured one of the few traditional homes left in the village (Figures 1–2) as mostly these old houses are being demolished, and new concrete houses are built. I have witnessed it myself because our traditional house was also demolished fifteen years ago. I met four grandmothers on the same day and spent time explaining what I was planning to do and why this research was important. It was necessary to brief them personally to ensure their participation. I explained the full plan for the workshop day, including the timing, travel arrangements, location, and seating setup. All of them shared that it had been many years since they had last spun wool, but they still showed interest in participating. This process was very meaningful for me because it allowed me to connect with them on a personal level. During these visits, I listened to their stories, understood their physical conditions, and explained the purpose of the workshop. Many of them expressed both emotional and physical limitations, but they were still willing and even excited to participate. For some, it was an opportunity to revisit memories and experiences they had not engaged with for many years.

At the same time, I met young girls near KADO and asked if they would be interested in participating in such an activity (Figures 1–2) and the response from the children was very positive. Some of them were on their summer vacations, and their excitement became a strong motivation for me to organise the workshop with care. I also spoke with some parents to explain

the purpose of the workshop and to seek permission for their children to participate. Consent forms were provided to every individual who participated in the workshop and the research.



Figures 1–2. Initial meeting with young participants and a local home visit during interactions with grandmothers. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

In parallel, I continued arranging materials and meeting people to prepare for the workshop day. Azam at KADO was able to find some wool for the workshop, which was leftover from a project that had taken place a few years earlier. This helped me gather the basic material needed for the activity.

Finding the traditional spindle, which is called *Ganxch* (Figure 17), was quite difficult, as very few people still keep these tools. The grandmothers would need the same tool to spin the wool. I asked around among neighbors and relatives, and finally a friend of my brother mentioned that his grandmother's *Ganxch* were still at their home. He brought me two of them for the workshop. I also arranged the overall setting, including rugs, cushions, seating, and baskets for the wool, in order to create a comfortable and welcoming environment. I wanted to keep everything visually simple and familiar. The seating arrangement was on the ground, which is part of our local tradition and was also more comfortable for the grandmothers and other participants.

Site Selection and Institutional Collaboration

Choosing the right location for the workshop was an important part of the planning, as I intended to document the workshop for the film. For this purpose, I collaborated with filmmaker Nadeem Alkarimi, a Hunza-based ethnographic filmmaker. During this time, I met with Nadeem and we

discussed the possible locations. We also talked about camera work and developed a rough outline for the documentary film so that he could prepare and plan his side of the work. We also decided on the date and time of the day to ensure suitable light and weather conditions.

I explored different locations within *Hyderabad* village and the surrounding areas. Through this process, I connected with local residents who helped me identify suitable spaces. I needed a location that was accessible and where the environment would be comfortable for all participants. I visited the upper part of *Hyderabad*, called *Shabaran*, which was once the center for community festivals and events in the village.

Shabaran appeared to be the most suitable place. While visiting a garden there, I asked about its owners and coincidentally met an old school friend. She showed me the family garden as well as a nearby heritage site, which was an old mosque (Figures 3-4). The wall carvings on the mosque were ancient and held significant historical and architectural value. I took photographs and shared them with Nadeem. The garden seemed most suitable for the main workshop, where everyone could comfortably sit on the ground, while the mosque (Figures 3-4) provided a meaningful setting for another part where the grandmothers could gather and spin wool. These locations were finalized after visiting them multiple times and considering both practical and cultural aspects. The involvement of local residents in this process also strengthened my connection with the community.



Figures 3–4. First site visits: the old mosque and a local home garden in Hyderabad. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

Workshop Implementation and Participant Engagement

The workshop brought together five grandmothers aged between 75 and 90 and eight children between the ages of 8 and 12. I worked with a team of six people, including two videographers and three volunteers who supported in managing the participants and organizing the activities. The workshop lasted for around four hours. My approach was to keep the environment organic and flexible rather than strictly following a structure, because I had to be mindful of the grandmothers' health, mood, and energy levels, and allow the interactions to happen naturally. One grandmother was nearly 90 years old and could not walk for long due to joint problems. When I picked them up from their homes, I realized that we had to be very careful. The setup and our team were ready by 1pm., and the children were already at the location. Once everything was prepared, I went to pick up the grandmothers so that they would not have to sit and wait for long.

Being together was a joyful moment for all the grandmothers, and we witnessed very heartwarming scenes when they first met exchanging hugs, kisses, prayers, and praising each other. Wool spinning was the central activity, but the workshop was not limited to the craft itself. It created a space for conversations, storytelling, and shared experiences. The grandmothers began to talk about their childhood, their daily lives in the past, and how they had learned these practices. For many of them, it was a moment of reconnecting with memories they had not revisited in years.

In the first phase of the workshop, we engaged mainly with the grandmothers, allowing them to share their experiences while spinning wool. They talked about their childhood, their daily lives in the past, and how they see society today, especially in relation to how children are raised now compared to before. While they were spinning wool, the hand movements and confidence in their gestures reflected how long they had practiced this craft, even though they were returning to it after more than 20 years. The film team actively documented these moments. After this, we had a tea break so that everyone could relax, as it had already been an emotional and engaging experience for many of us.

After the break, we moved to the family garden, which was only a few yards away from the first location. In the second part of the workshop, we welcomed the young participants. I briefly introduced the plan for the day, explained the purpose of my research, and described what they would be doing. I tried to keep the instructions simple and avoided directing them too much so that interactions could develop naturally. The grandmothers began teaching the children how to prepare the wool before spinning it (Figure 5). The children immediately started interacting with the material. For all of them, it was their first time touching and working with wool.

This session continued for about an hour and a half. During this time, the grandmothers also shared stories about the clothes they used to make from wool, the characteristics of the material, how it was washed, and when it was worn. The children asked many questions, and the initial hesitation between the two generations quickly turned into a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. One reason for this was that almost everyone knew each other, as they all belonged to the same village. The children were actively observing, listening, and asking questions. Their curiosity and excitement showed that this was a completely new experience for them.



Figure 5. Grandmothers demonstrating wool crafts to children, Hyderabad. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

The workshop ended with food and a sense of shared happiness, as everything had gone well throughout the day. I was amazed by everyone's contribution and support, especially the participants and volunteers who remained present throughout the process. The workshop became more than just an activity; it turned into a space of emotional and social connection (Figure 6). I observed moments of laughter, storytelling, and shared attention. For the grandmothers, this experience brought back memories and created a sense of joy and recognition. For the children, it was an opportunity to engage with something they had never experienced before. The exchange between them reflected the potential of such spaces to rebuild connections across generations (Figure 7). The data collected during this process includes video recordings, photographs, conversations, and my personal reflections. After the workshop, I also gathered feedback from the children and my volunteer team, which added another layer of understanding to the experience.



Figure 6. Children listening to stories and engaging with wool, Hyderabad. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.



Figure 7. Grandmothers interacting and conversing with children, Hyderabad. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

Interviews and Informal Community Dialogues

Alongside the workshop, conversations and interviews with community members were an important part of my field research. These interactions helped me understand different perspectives on the past lifestyle of the community, the role of crafts, and the social changes people have witnessed over time. Some discussions occurred as informal conversations during field visits, while others were more structured interviews. Through these interactions, I collected stories, observations, and reflections from people who have lived most of their lives in Hunza and have witnessed these changes closely.

One important conversation during the fieldwork was with Mr. Deedar Ali, whom Faheem Baig recommended that I meet. Deedar Ali has been weaving since 1992 and now runs a traditional crafts shop in Karimabad. When I visited his shop, I asked him about weaving practices in the region and how they have changed over the years. He explained that in the past almost all women used to spin wool, and men would weave cloth from the yarn. According to him, there were more than fifteen men weaving in Karimabad alone. However, he explained that for the last fifteen to twenty years there has not been a single active fabric weaver in the region. There was a

traditional old loom (Figure 8) displayed in his shop which, according to him, is the last loom in central Hunza. It's not in a condition to easily move to anywhere else; for that it needs to be disassembled and is at risk of damage.



Figure 8. One of the last remaining weaving looms displayed in a craft shop, Karimabad, Hunza. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

He further mentioned that the biggest challenge today is not to make more looms or find people who know how to weave, but the disappearance of wool processing and yarn production. According to him, people no longer keep sheep or process wool locally, which has broken the entire chain of traditional textile production. This conversation helped me understand how deeply the traditional craft system has declined and how difficult it would be to revive the entire process today.

I was also able to do interviews with two elders of the community (Figure 9 & 10). A detailed thematic interview with Mr. Imdad Ali was a rich contribution to the research. An 88-year-old resident of Hyderabad village, he is a former teacher, retired army officer, religious scholar, and community leader who holds extensive knowledge about the history and social life of Hunza

(Figure 9 & 10). Our discussion focused on community life in the past, traditional values, and the changes he has observed over the decades. He shared memories about how closely connected people were in earlier times, how storytelling was an important part of everyday life, and how community members supported each other through shared responsibilities and collective work. His reflections provided valuable insight into the cultural values and social structures that once shaped the community.

In addition to these interviews, I had many informal conversations with community members during the workshop and field visits. While visiting KADO, I also met the CEO and his wife, where we discussed how social dynamics are changing today, how the younger generation relates to their culture and traditions, and what challenges exist in maintaining these cultural practices. Similarly, during the workshop itself, conversations happened naturally between participants, volunteers, and local residents who visited the site. These discussions added another layer of understanding to my research, as they reflected personal memories, emotions, and lived experiences related to the cultural practices of the community.

Together, these interviews and conversations became an important part of my research data. They helped me connect personal narratives with broader social changes and provided deeper insight into how traditional practices, community relations, and everyday life have transformed over time in Hunza.



Figures 9–10. Interviews with community elders, Hyderabad. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

Engaging Children through the *Sharma* Center Visit (KADO Hyderabad)

After completing the workshop, I wanted to give the children an opportunity to see another aspect of traditional craft practices by visiting the *Sharma* Center at KADO. Although the children were from the same village and were generally familiar with activities happening within the community, I felt that a more structured visit would help them understand the craft process in greater detail and allow them to meet the artisans who work there. For this purpose, I arranged a visit with Mr. Sultan Azam, who manages the *Sharma* Center, and the following day we visited the center together.

During the visit, Azam briefly explained the process of making *Sharma* step by step while the artisans were engaged in their daily work. The children observed how goat hair is processed, how ropes are made, and how spinning is carried out using different types of spindles (Figures 11-13). The tools and machinery used at the center are larger and more mechanical compared to the traditional hand techniques, as the center focuses on the production of traditional rugs. The children also met the artisans working there, many of whom are individuals with special needs (Figures 11-13). As mentioned earlier, this initiative was created to empower members of the community with special needs and include them in productive community work.

Most of the children already knew some of the artisans, and they interacted with them comfortably and confidently. The artisans welcomed us with warm smiles and curiosity (Figure 14). Although we did not have long conversations with everyone working there, Azam explained the different types of rugs produced at the center, how they are maintained, their lifespan, and the methods used for washing and caring for them. This visit provided an opportunity to closely observe the work being done to keep the *Sharma* tradition alive while also supporting members of the community with special needs (Figures 11-13). For the children, this experience became an important extension of the workshop with the grandmothers, as they were able to see another dimension of craft practices related to wool and fiber. It further expanded their understanding of local traditions and the role of craft within the community.



Figures 11–13. Artisans working at the Sharma Center, KADO, and children’s visit to the facility. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

Figure 14. Artisan presenting a handwoven rug at KADO. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

Documentation, Film Production, and Exhibition Outcomes

The short documentary film is an integral element of this research, as it reflects the idea of connection between crafts, community, language, and cultural values (Figure 15). It is also an important component within the Arts-Based Action Research approach, as I plan to publicly share the film with community members in particular and with anyone who feels disconnected from their culture. I compiled footage from the workshop and the interviews to create a five-minute documentary film. I describe it as a documentary because it is based on non-fiction visuals and real-life stories. The voice-over of Imdad Ali connects the visual scenes and helps shape the narrative of the film. The archival images used in the film are historical photographs of Hunza and nearby regions, mostly taken in the 1930s. The music used in the film is a local tune played on the traditional flute by Anwar Khan, a local musician.



Figure 15. Audience viewing the documentary film during the exhibition. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

While spending a year reconnecting with these traditions and cultural practices, I also began practicing different crafts myself so that I could engage both physically and mentally with the subject of my research. My interest in weaving developed about a year ago through a course and later during my internship at Taito Lappi. Alongside the film and the ABAR research process, I felt the need to create something through weaving that could reflect my personal connection and reflection on heritage. I designed the warp for a scarf using natural shades of wool. The natural browns, whites, and greys of wool have always been strongly present in my visual memory, which is why I chose to use these tones in the weaving (Figure 16). The subtle diamond and herringbone patterns also reflect the simplicity of patterns often seen in traditional rugs from Hunza (Figure 16).

Because of the simple lifestyle and the challenging weather and landscape conditions of the region, the use of color in traditional textiles has historically been very limited. As far as I know, wool and other animal fibers were mostly used in their natural colors, and there is no clear evidence of traditional wool dyeing practices in the region. Colorful textiles were introduced later through trade when merchants travelled along the Silk Route, the ancient trading route in

Asia that passed through Hunza. Over time, colorful yarns became widely used in embroidery and decorative textiles, although these materials were also imported from surrounding regions.



Figure 16. Handwoven scarf displayed as part of the exhibition. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

As part of presenting the outcomes of this research, I organized a solo exhibition at the University of Lapland, where I displayed the documentary film alongside the woven scarf (Figures 15 & 16). In addition to these works, I also created a photo journal (Figure 17) of my field research. This journal includes photographs taken during the research process along with written descriptions and personal reflections that document the journey and experiences throughout the project. The exhibition also included the traditional men's cap of Hunza and two old spindles which were used during the workshop with a small amount of spun wool of Finnish sheep (Figure 17).

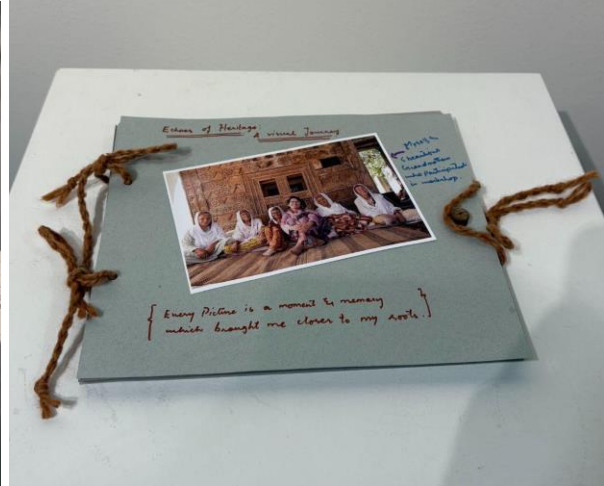


Figure 17. Traditional men's cap of Hunza and spinning tools (Ganxch). Photograph by Reema, 2025.

Figure 18. Visual journal documenting the research process. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

Through this fieldwork process, I was able to move from initial uncertainty to a deeper engagement with the community and the cultural practices I aimed to explore. The interactions with local organizations, elders, artisans, and children allowed the research to develop organically while grounding it in lived experiences. The workshop, interviews, and informal conversations together created a rich body of material that reflects both personal memories and broader social transformations within the community. These experiences not only shaped my understanding of heritage and social values but also highlighted the importance of creating spaces where cultural knowledge can be shared across generations. The following chapter presents the findings and analysis derived from these interactions and observations.

Research Findings and Analysis

Community Life and Social Bonds in the Past

In this chapter, I present the analysis of the research. Rather than separating research findings from personal experience, this chapter brings together stories, memories, observations, and creative practice to understand how cultural values, craft traditions, and community life in Hunza have changed over time. To make sense of the diverse range of data gathered during this phase, I organized it into key themes. This approach helped me map different data points emerging from interviews, conversations, and the workshop. I identified four main thematic areas: understanding community life in the past, cultural change and shifting social structures, the role of craft practices in community connections, and intergenerational learning through these practices as reflected in the workshop.

Collective Living and Shared Responsibilities

Through my conversations with elders and observations during fieldwork, I began to understand how deeply connected and resilient the people of Hunza were in the past. Many participants described a lifestyle based on shared responsibilities, strong relationships, and daily interaction within the community (Figures 19). Imdad Ali recalled that during his childhood the region was economically poor and geographically isolated. However, despite the scarcity of resources, social relationships were strong and people maintained great respect for one another. Families often lived close together, and daily life involved constant interaction with neighbors and relatives (Figures 19). During my interview with Mr. Imdad Ali, he reflected on how life in his childhood was closely tied to the community. He said:

In the past, food was shared in one large dish for the whole family. Like in *Arab* culture, where they eat traditional Hareesa in one big plate, we would also eat together from one dish. Father, brothers, and children would eat from the same dish, and on the other side, women, mother and sisters would also eat together from one dish. When people ate together like this, there was love and closeness. But now, people don't eat together in one dish. Everyone eats on separate plates, and like the plates we also become separate from each other.

He further reflected that today people have plenty of food but often do not express gratitude for it. According to him, although the world is now described as global, Hunza had already embodied a form of collective life where people lived closely together and supported one another. Women often played a central role in maintaining the household and ensuring the well-being of the family.



Figure 19. Archival photograph of the Hunza community, captured by David Lockhart Robertson Lorimer in the 1930s.

They were responsible for preparing food, caring for children, managing household tasks, and supporting agricultural work. Their knowledge and skills were essential for the functioning of both the household and the wider community. While discussing strong social bonds, Imdad Ali narrated a story about his childhood neighbors:

There was so much compassion among our mothers. There were seven mothers in our neighborhood. A couple of them would always be new mothers. Early in the morning, those would stay home while others went out to the fields, to the mountains, or down to the river to work. Our women were very strong and hard-working; they worked just like men. When they returned home, the mother who had stayed behind would call and say, "Listen, your child was crying, but I breast-fed him; don't worry now." Others would tell her, "I have fed your cattle as well."

He explained that we all children from seven different families grew up together like real brothers and sisters. This example illustrates how childcare was not limited to biological parents but was shared collectively within the community. Similarly, agricultural tasks were carried out through cooperation. During harvest seasons or when families needed help managing livestock, neighbors and relatives would gather to assist one another. Such practices strengthened social bonds and created a strong sense of mutual responsibility.

Respect for Land, Food, and Nature

The collective lifestyle of the community also fostered a strong respect for nature and natural resources. Because survival depended directly on land, animals, and crops, people valued these elements as fundamental to their existence. Imdad Ali explained that food was never taken for granted. People recognized the effort required to cultivate crops and raise livestock (Figures 20–22). Meals were often accompanied by expressions of gratitude toward the land and the resources that sustained life. He reflected on the sacrifices made by earlier generations:

Our grandfathers transformed this barren soil into fertile, lush fields while they had empty stomachs. They collected apricots from wild bushes and sowed those seeds from which we are eating fruits today. They soaked the seeds with little water they had, even when their mouths were dry.

They used a phenomenon of Imaginary food when there was nothing to feed hungry children. “Grandmother would tell stories and lullabies of delicious food they will be going to eat soon, and the child would fall asleep imagining all kinds of food they are listening to.” He said that “we were in that kind of condition to write songs and poetry about food.” He continued by explaining with this devotion and effort, earlier generations built the foundation of the community: “Through this effort our fathers and grandfathers populated the whole village and Hunza, making it a paradise. They endured hardship and left comfort for us.” These reflections illustrate the deep relationship between community members and their natural environment.

Intergenerational Learning and the Importance of Craft Practices

In earlier generations, learning was not divided into formal and informal systems. Knowledge was transmitted naturally through observation, participation, and everyday engagement with community life. Children learned skills and values by watching elders and gradually participating in daily activities (Figures 20–22). Craft practices were therefore not treated as specialized skills to be learned later in life but as ordinary aspects of living within the community.

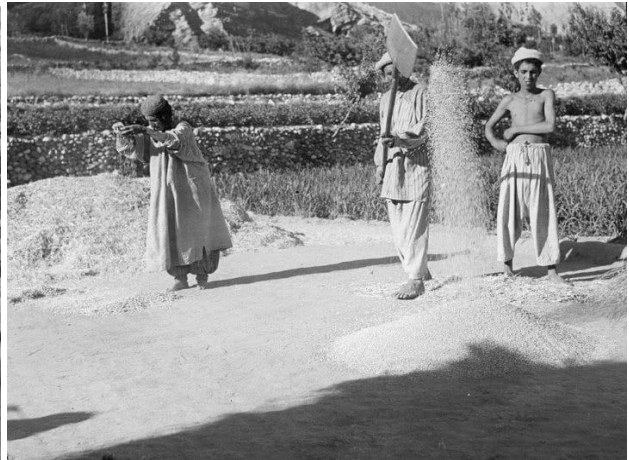
During my visits with the grandmothers who later participated in the workshop, many of them explained how they learned wool spinning by observing their mothers and older women in the household. From a young age, children sat alongside elders, watching their movements and gradually assisting with small tasks (Figures 20–22). Through this process, craft knowledge was passed from one generation to the next in a natural and continuous way. Faheem Baig, who works with the Karakoram Area Development Organization (KADO), also described how craft activities functioned as collective learning environments during his childhood. Reflecting on these experiences, he explained:

“When I was a child, preparing yarn to weave and make cloth (*Phila'am*) used to be a community activity. All the elders or craftsmen gathered at *Shabaran*, the common village space. It was a combined activity, and all of us children would surround them, watching how they worked, playing with yarn, and helping with small tasks.”

This description highlights how craft practices were embedded within community spaces and social interaction. Children were not formally instructed but learned through observation and participation while elders carried out their work. Craft activities also functioned as important social spaces where community members gathered, shared stories, and strengthened relationships. Women often met in groups to spin wool while talking about daily life and supporting one another. Imdad Ali described similar experiences of collective learning during his childhood:

Whenever the basket-weaving expert came and set up his space, everyone from children to elders gathered around him. We watched how he prepared the willow sticks, made the base, and wove the basket. Both young and old learned just by watching. Many of our aunts and grandmothers also practiced such crafts. There were baskets like *chura giran*, *chura*, *giran*, *Phurukus* and *khareti* for working with wool. It was a beautiful skill, a true craft of our grandmothers.”

These shared craft activities therefore created informal learning environments where knowledge was transmitted through practice, observation, and storytelling.



Figures 20–22. Archival images showing craft-based lifestyles in Hunza during the 1930s. Photographs by David Lockhart Robertson Lorimer.

In addition to teaching practical skills, elders also used everyday experiences to transmit cultural values and ethical principles to younger generations. Storytelling in daily life was a vital tool for

passing down values; grandfathers taught the value of sacrifice. Imdad Ali shared a memory from his childhood of walking in the mountains with his grandfather. They used to carry dried apricots to eat while tracking with cattle. At one moment, when he ate the apricot dried plum he also wanted to eat the apricot seed, but his grandfather gently stopped him and said:

No, my child. These seeds we will plant so that your children, your grandchildren, and their children will benefit from this tree. Then he sowed the seed, put some drops of water, raised his hands towards the sky, prayed to seek blessings and grow this tree with ample fruit for my grandchildren.

Through such experiences, children developed respect and care for land, trees, animals, and future generations. These teachings were not delivered as formal lessons but were embedded within everyday activities and interactions with elders. Overall, these reflections illustrate that craft practices played an important role not only in producing useful objects but also in creating environments where cultural values, ecological awareness, and social responsibilities were transmitted across generations.

Women as Custodians of Knowledge

Women played a particularly important role in preserving craft knowledge and household practices within the community. The grandmothers who participated in my workshop described how they learned a wide range of skills from their mothers and elders, including wool spinning, food preservation, farming practices, and household management. These skills were not learned individually but through collective work within domestic and agricultural settings. While working together in fields, kitchens, and community spaces, women shared their knowledge with younger generations (Figures 20–22). Through repeated observation and participation, young girls gradually developed the abilities required to manage households and contribute to community life.

Imdad Ali reflected on this form of knowledge with deep respect, emphasizing the complexity and importance of these skills. He explained that mothers or grandmothers used to be head of households, they were responsible to manage everything related to food, the consumption,

storage and management. She would set the family's eating habits according to the harvest of that year. Some years would be blessed with greater production of crops and some years there would be poor harvest due to natural disasters of lack of rain. Since the food had to last the whole year, it was an important responsibility to manage the food.

This was considered a great skill, almost like a form of higher education. Today, people pursue advanced degrees, but back then, this knowledge was like a "PhD" for women knowing how to manage food and resources for the entire year. They also knew how to use wool to make many things: clothes, thread, and other essentials. They had this natural knowledge and wisdom, which helped the whole family survive and live well.

This highlights the depth of practical knowledge held by women within the community. Their expertise ensured that families could remain self-sufficient and survive in the challenging mountain environment throughout the year, especially in winters when they were only dependent on preserved food from summer. Women were therefore not only caretakers of households but also custodians of cultural knowledge, ecological understanding, and craft traditions.

Disappearance and Role of Craft Practices

Through my fieldwork, it became clear that craft practices were once central to everyday life in the community, yet today many of these practices have largely disappeared. These activities were not only about producing useful items; they were closely connected to social relationships, cultural identity, and shared community life. During conversations with elders, especially the grandmothers, I learned that wool processing and thread-making were regular daily activities. Women frequently gathered in groups to spin wool while talking, sharing stories, and spending time together. These moments created strong social connections and meaningful communal spaces.

While talking to the eldest grandmother when I visited her home, she showed her willingness to participate and shared some of her sorrows, especially how she feels confined to her home and cannot go out because of her health issues. She also mentioned that weaving and thread-making have long been forgotten, and it has been many years since she last practiced them. She recalled

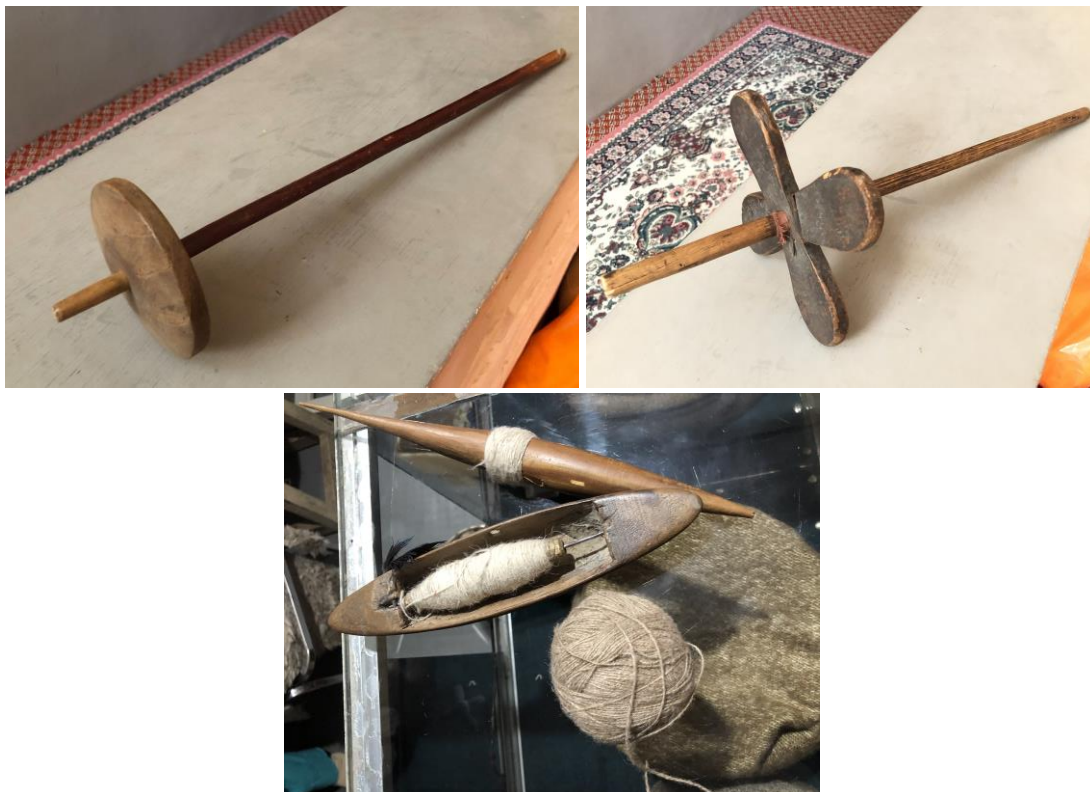
how there used to be competitions among women about how fast and how well they could make thread, and she proudly shared that she was one of the fastest in the village during her time. However, this system has gradually broken down. My discussion with Mr. Deedar Ali provided a deeper understanding of how this transformation occurred. He explained that in the past there was a complete ecosystem surrounding craft production. Women processed wool and produced yarn, while men used this yarn to weave cloth. Deedar Ali himself had been weaving since 1992 and had also trained people in several craft centers. Reflecting on that time, he explained: “At that time there were many who used to weave, and only in Karimabad there were more than 15 men weaving.” Today, however, this practice has nearly disappeared. As he further explained: “For the last 15–20 years, there is not a single man who still weaves.”

According to him, although weaving knowledge may still exist among some individuals, the primary challenge is the disappearance of wool processing and yarn production. He mentioned another project a few years ago executed by KADO that was focused on producing locally weaved fabrics, scarfs but that did not sustain for long. Because the biggest challenge in this process is to supply local wool to be spun. People no longer keep sheep or process wool locally, which has disrupted the entire production chain. Deedar Ali also mentioned that the loom displayed in his shop is likely the last remaining loom in the region, and it is now used only occasionally for special orders. This illustrates how fragile and close to disappearance these traditions have become. Another important change that emerged from my discussions was the shift from local production to imported goods.

During the fieldwork, the gradual disappearance of traditional craft practices became evident not only through conversations with participants but also through the physical absence of tools and materials required for these practices. One of the key challenges during the planning and production phase of this research was locating basic weaving and spinning tools, as well as raw wool for processing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this required visiting multiple households and asking community members whether such tools were still preserved. In most cases, the tools were no longer in use but kept as objects of display. I observed a weaving loom placed on a shelf in a local craft shop and a few spindle tools preserved in a friend’s home (Figures 23–25). These objects, once central to everyday life and production, now function

primarily as symbolic representations of cultural heritage rather than as active elements of daily practice. This shift reflects a broader transformation in which material culture is increasingly detached from its original context and function. As Dan Ben-Amos (2023) argues, when cultural objects are removed from their lived environments, they lose their functional and experiential significance, becoming static representations rather than living practices.

A similar pattern can be observed in the cultural identity of the community itself. While Hunza continues to be widely recognized for its rich cultural heritage, much of this identity is now expressed through visible and performative forms such as music, festivals, and dance. In contrast, everyday practices such as weaving, spinning, and other forms of material production are becoming less visible and less practiced. This suggests that culture, much like the tools associated with it, is gradually shifting from a lived, embedded experience to a curated and symbolic display.



Figures 23–25. Weaving and spinning tools displayed in a home and a local shop. Photograph by Reema, 2025.

Deedar Ali explained that many traditional-looking products sold in local craft shops today are not produced in Hunza but are brought from other regions. I was also aware of this situation, as a large number of tourists purchase scarves and shawls as local souvenirs; however, these are often sourced from regions such as *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)* and *Kashmir* rather than being locally made. At the same time, there are locally produced crafts that continue to support groups of women artisans, particularly embroidery and stitching-based products such as bags and garments. There is also a wider range of crafts still practiced in the region, including embroidered items, gemstones, jewelry, and wood-based carvings. However, the focus of this research is specifically on wool-based practices, weaving traditions, and other community-based crafts such as basketry.

When I was doing my Product Design bachelor's thesis from National College of Arts, Lahore Pakistan, I explored basketry traditions in central Hunza and found that this practice is now almost extinct locally. In contrast, nearby regions such as *Nagar* continue to actively produce basketry using local materials. As a result, many basketry products available in the markets of central Hunza are also sourced from these neighboring areas. This further highlights the gradual decline of certain local craft practices within Hunza and the increasing reliance on external production.

Several grandmothers also shared how ageing and changing lifestyles have affected their ability to continue practicing these crafts. One grandmother explained that due to health limitations she no longer participates in any community activity. Similar reflections were shared by other participants, who said that they now spend most of their time at home and rarely have opportunities to gather collectively for such activities. Through these conversations, I came to understand that craft practices once functioned as important spaces for connection, learning, and shared experience within the community. Their disappearance therefore represents not only the loss of practical skills but also the disappearance of social environments where knowledge, stories, and relationships were nurtured. This understanding also shaped the design of my workshop. Because weaving is no longer widely practiced, I chose to focus on wool spinning as a more accessible way to reconnect with these traditions and reopen spaces for intergenerational interaction.

Cultural Change and Shifting Social Structures

Hunza has experienced significant cultural transformations over the past few decades. While the region has developed in terms of education, infrastructure, tourism, and economic opportunities, many elders emphasized that these developments have also reshaped the social structures that once defined everyday community life. Systems of cooperation, shared labor, and interdependence have gradually shifted toward more individualized lifestyles.

Participants frequently reflected on how daily life in the past was organized around collective responsibilities and shared cultural practices. Today, many of these practices are either disappearing or becoming less central to everyday life. As a result, patterns of social interaction, knowledge transfer, and community cohesion have also changed. The following sections explore several areas where these transformations are particularly visible. Imdad Ali has a powerful reflection about this transformation;

If we look at today's time, we have become ungrateful. People don't want to do any kind of work, especially physical work. We don't like hard work, but we all like good food and good clothes. Everyone wants to eat well and dress well, but without effort. That is why there is a huge difference between the past and today. Now everything is about selling even for the sake of living a luxurious life, people are ready to sell their land and even their homes. But then what respect is left behind?

Individualism and the Decline of Collective Life

One of the broader cultural shifts described by many participants relates to the gradual movement from collective community life toward more individualized ways of living. Earlier social systems in Hunza were built around cooperation and shared responsibilities. People worked together in agriculture, construction, festivals, and household production, which strengthened relationships and fostered a strong sense of mutual support. Imdad Ali reflected on how closely connected people were in earlier times. According to him, community members regularly visited one another, shared food and labor, and participated collectively in community activities. These practices strengthened social bonds and created a sense of responsibility toward the wider community. However, he also described how this situation has gradually changed:

Our relationships have also become separate, our connections have weakened, and love has reduced. Our benefits and losses have also become individual. Now, when we have lived our lives and grown old, and we look back, we see a clear difference between the life we had before and the life we have today. There's a big difference between life then and now. Today, there's plenty of comfort but little compassion; our stomachs are full, but gratitude is rare. In the past, we were hungry, yet we remembered God. We felt the cold, yet we remembered God and we remembered our relatives too, because they were the ones who stood by us in times of need.

While reflecting on relations and possible reasons within community he continues:

Nowadays, after getting our children married, we have to teach them who their relatives are, who are like their sister and brother, who is like their mother and that they should value and respect these relationships. We have to teach them all this after marriage when they are grown. Whereas they should already know. This is because now our community has spread out a lot, and the area has become much larger.

Although cultural expressions such as festivals, music, and tourism-related events still exist and are being celebrated with full pride, these activities are often disconnected from everyday social life. Traditions that once formed the foundation of daily community interaction are increasingly represented as symbolic cultural elements. While economic development and modern education have created new opportunities for younger generations, they have also altered the social dynamics that previously connected families and communities.

Despite the visible decline in collective ways of living, the fieldwork also revealed moments that reflect the continuity of deeply rooted cultural values within the community. While modern development and changing lifestyles have transformed many aspects of everyday life, certain social qualities particularly hospitality, generosity, and openness remain strongly present. Throughout the research process, I experienced this firsthand. Many individuals whom I met had no prior connection with me, yet they welcomed me with warmth and genuine kindness. This

sense of openness, often described as a defining characteristic of the people of Hunza, continues to shape everyday interactions.

These encounters were not only meaningful on a personal level but also significant in understanding the persistence of intangible cultural values. As Soini and Birkeland (2014) suggest, cultural sustainability is not only reflected in material practices but also in the values, relationships, and social behaviors that continue to exist within a community. In this sense, even as certain collective practices decline, the underlying ethos of connection and mutual respect has not entirely disappeared.

One particular moment that remains especially memorable occurred during a visit to meet community members who were working in their fields. As it began to rain, they were collecting wheat, yet they paused and expressed a willingness to engage with us and be photographed (Figure 26). This interaction with many others reflects a continuity of openness and shared humanity that extends beyond familiarity or kinship. Such moments suggest that while the structures of collective life may be changing, the values that once sustained them are still present and can serve as a foundation for rebuilding social connections in contemporary contexts.



Figure 26. Elderly couple collecting wheat before rainfall. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

Loss of Self-Sufficiency and Local Skills

Another major key theory that emerged was the gradual loss of self-sufficiency within the community. In earlier generations, people in Hunza relied largely on their own resources and

knowledge to sustain daily life. Local materials such as wool, animal hair, wood, and agricultural products were processed within the community to create clothing, household items, and tools necessary for survival in the mountain environment.

Today, however, many of these items are purchased from markets, often sourced from other regions within the province and across the country. Imdad Ali described how even basic resources, including daily groceries, vegetables, and meat, are now obtained from outside the region. This shift is also evident during important social and cultural events. Traditionally, during wedding ceremonies or rituals following a death, large quantities of food, particularly dishes such as *Hareesa* and *Sharbat*, are prepared and distributed among relatives, neighbours, and the wider community. These practices continue today; however, the resources used for preparation are increasingly sourced externally rather than being produced within the community itself. He explained:

I have been performing the rituals of death ceremony from many years in this village and other villages, I have witness it most of the time that after the burial ceremony family comes together to arrange wheat or meat, they immediately call relatives who live in other regions far in *Oshkhandaas*, *Guuro* (towns in Gilgit) and ask them to arrange meat and wheat for the ceremony as those regions are rich with locally produced wheat, corn and farm meat. We do not even cultivate those things anymore that can easily be grown here. We do not have enough cattle anymore. Now we buy everything from outside.

He also expressed concern that the available land is no longer being used to its full potential, questioning why communities do not cultivate vegetables and crops that can easily be grown locally. He noted that reliance on markets has increased to the extent that even basic items, which could be produced at home, are now routinely purchased. This reflection highlights a broader shift in values and practices within the community.

This shift can be understood in relation to the broader socio-economic transformations taking place in Hunza, particularly the rapid growth of tourism and market-based livelihoods. As tourism, education, and wage employment have expanded, the economic focus has gradually moved from production to consumption. People now increasingly rely on income from service

industries and external markets rather than on locally sustained practices. This reflects what Kreutzmann (2020) describes in mountain communities, where development projects often overlook the importance of traditional livelihood systems while new economic opportunities create what he calls a “gold rush” situation, especially through tourism and trade.

In Hunza, the rise of domestic tourism has created new aspirations for income generation, encouraging communities to prioritize quick economic returns over slower community-based production systems. As a result, many local skills and practices that once supported household self-sufficiency are losing their everyday function. Although these changes have improved access to income and services, they have also weakened the sustainable cycles of reciprocity, local resource use, and shared responsibility that once structured community life. This transformation becomes particularly visible in Figure 36, which shows Aliabad town. Having been born and raised there, I have personally witnessed the scale of change over time: the rapid increase in concrete buildings, the rise in traffic, and the growing sense of congestion and disorder. Returning now, I often feel a sense of loss when experiencing this shift firsthand. What is evident here is not only a transition but also a deeper cultural transformation, where traditional systems of cooperation are gradually being replaced by market dependence and more individualised economic priorities.



Figures 36. Aliabad town which has the major market of Hunza. Photographer: Hunzographer 2026. One grandmother also reflected on how household practices have

changed, particularly in relation to childcare. She explained: “Today daughters buy everything from the shop to feed the child; powdered milk, pampers. After using them, they dump in garbage then these diapers are carried away to burn later in *Don-e-Das* (a barren mountain often used to burn local garbage).” (Check figure 37 which is a drone image of the place where all the local garbage is burnt). Her frustration over this cycle was evident to watch and how subtly she highlighted that consumer products have replaced traditional practices while also introducing environmental concerns related to waste disposal. These observations demonstrate that earlier craft practices were deeply embedded within both the social and ecological systems of the community. As these practices decline, the knowledge, skills, and social interactions associated with them are also gradually fading.



Figures 37. Don-e-Das (a barren mountain often used to burn local garbage). Photographer: Hunzographer 2026.

Changing Culture in the Upbringing of Children

Another significant key theory relates to the changing cultural environment in which children are growing up today. As this has been previously discussed as well, in the past, children learned values, skills, and social responsibilities through everyday participation in family and community life. Activities such as farming, household work, storytelling, festivals, and craft-making enabled children to interact closely with elders and observe how knowledge was practiced in daily life. During my visits to several grandmothers before the workshop, many of them mentioned that storytelling used to be an important part of family life. Children would gather around elders to listen to stories about history, traditions, and moral values. Today, however, children often spend significant amounts of time with their studies, using phones and digital devices, which reduces opportunities for such interactions.

Participants during the workshop also expressed concern about changes in how children are raised today. According to the grandmother, children in earlier generations were raised in a nurturing and patient environment. They described how mothers and grandmothers spent considerable time caring for infants, singing lullabies, and sharing stories that conveyed cultural values. Children were traditionally lulled to sleep with sweet songs and stories. I myself am a

witness that we do have many lullabies and songs which have been sung by mothers beautifully portraying the conversations of a mother with her child.

One grandmother explained: “In our time we never scolded children in a high voice like this. From the day a child was born we would sing to them and take care of them gently like praising the newborn.” She contrasted this with current parenting practices: “Today if a child breaks a glass, they shout at the child and use harsh words. It was never like this before.” Another major change identified by participants was the increasing presence of digital technology in children's lives. Elders observed that children now spend significant time using mobile phones, which reduces opportunities for interaction with older generations. This shift has weakened the informal learning processes that once occurred through storytelling, shared work, and everyday community interactions.

Imdad expressed his feelings about the social change overall and particularly children in distress and a humorous way that;

Today, thank God, our condition has improved so much that even the President of America may not live as comfortably as we do now. However, if we try to live exactly like people in America or Paris, we may lose our values, we may forget our parents, our roots, everything. In the past, we used to call our mother with love, like “*aga mama*,” but today children say “daddy,” and in doing so, much of the wisdom and feeling is lost. What will they learn then? If we become too materialistic, we will turn away from God and forget everything. But if we remember God, keep spirituality in mind, and control our desires, then we can rise higher. God has said that humans have both a soul and desires, while angels have only a soul and no desires. If we, as humans, control our desires, we can rise even above angels. But if we follow our desires blindly, we will lose our way completely.

These changes were also visible during the workshop. For many of the children, touching and working with wool was a completely new experience. Although they were curious and enthusiastic, it was clear that they had never previously engaged with such traditional materials. At the same time, the workshop demonstrated that when children are given opportunities to

interact with elders and traditional practices, they quickly become engaged. During the activity, the children asked many questions about wool processing, clothing made from wool, and how such materials were used in the past. These interactions suggest that the gap between generations may not result from a lack of interest among children but rather from the absence of spaces where such knowledge can be shared.

Reviving Crafts and Rebuilding Social Connections

Crafts-Based Community Workshop

The workshop I conducted as part of this research was designed as a small but meaningful attempt to recreate spaces where traditional connections between generations could emerge again. By bringing together grandmothers and children through the activity of wool spinning, the workshop created an environment where knowledge, memories, and experiences could be shared naturally. Rather than functioning only as a craft activity, I built a social space where storytelling, observation, and participation occurred simultaneously.

For the grandmothers, this gathering held strong emotional significance (Figures 31–34). Many of them had not practiced wool spinning for more than two decades, as these activities had gradually disappeared from everyday life. Returning to the craft therefore reactivated personal memories and embodied knowledge that had remained unused for many years. During the workshop, their confident hand movements while spinning wool reflected the depth of experience they had gained earlier in life (Figures 29–30). Several grandmothers expressed joy in being able to practice these skills again, especially in the presence of younger generations. In this sense, the activity became a moment of recognition for their lived experiences and skills.



Figures 27–28. Close-up of participants' hands engaging with wool during the workshop. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

The workshop also created an opportunity for the grandmothers to come together with one another. In earlier decades, women often gathered collectively while spinning wool, preparing food, or working in agricultural fields. These gatherings functioned as everyday spaces for communication, emotional support, and knowledge sharing. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many of these collective practices have disappeared due to changing lifestyles and economic structures. The workshop briefly recreated a similar atmosphere, where grandmothers exchanged stories, laughed together, and recalled memories from their childhood and early adulthood (Figures 31–34). Through this interaction, it became clear that craft practices historically functioned not only as productive labor but also as important social activities that strengthened relationships within the community.



Figures 29–30. Participants learning wool spinning from elders during the workshop. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

For the children, the experience was equally significant. Most of the young participants had never previously touched raw wool or observed the process of spinning thread. Although Hunza is widely associated with traditional textiles and handicrafts, many of these practices are no longer visible in everyday life. The workshop therefore introduced children to a material and process that once played an important role in the cultural life of the region (Figures 29–30). Their curiosity was evident as they asked questions about how wool was prepared, what types of clothing were made from it, and how these materials were used in the past. In many ways, this moment reflected the traditional modes of intergenerational learning described in the interviews, where knowledge was transmitted through observation, imitation, and storytelling rather than formal instruction.



Figures 31–34. Grandmothers meeting and greeting each other after a long time. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

The workshop therefore served as a practical demonstration of one of the key arguments emerging from this research: that craft practices can function as meaningful mediums for rebuilding social connections. Through a simple activity such as wool spinning, it became possible to create dialogue between generations, reconnect elders with their embodied knowledge, and introduce children to cultural practices that have largely disappeared from everyday life.

Documentary Film as an Arts-Based Reflection on Social Change

The documentary film created as part of this research extends this experience beyond the physical space of the workshop. While the workshop itself lasted only a few hours, the film captures and preserves the emotional and cultural significance of the interactions that took place. Through visual storytelling, it brings together scenes of grandmothers spinning wool, children learning the process, and elders reflecting on their memories of community life. The voice of Imdad Ali runs throughout the film and connects these scenes with broader reflections about social changes in Hunza.

By combining observational footage, oral narratives, and archival photographs, the film highlights the key themes discussed in this chapter: the strength of community life in earlier generations, the importance of craft practices in everyday social interaction, and the gradual disappearance of these practices due to social and economic changes. The archival images from the 1930s create a visual connection between past and present, allowing viewers to reflect on how landscapes, lifestyles, and cultural practices have evolved over time.

Within the framework of arts-based action research, the film functions not only as documentation but also as a form of engagement. It records the workshop and the stories shared by participants, while also encouraging reflection within the community. By presenting these experiences visually, the film communicates the findings of the research in a way that extends beyond written academic analysis. The narratives shared by elders in the film highlight several social issues discussed earlier in this chapter, including the decline of collective community life, the loss of self-sufficient systems, and the weakening of traditional learning environments for children. At the same time, the scenes from the workshop demonstrate that meaningful connections can still be created when spaces for intergenerational interaction are intentionally designed.

In this way, the workshop and the documentary film together illustrate the central insight of this research: although many traditional practices have declined, crafts still possess the potential to reconnect people and stimulate cultural dialogue. Even small initiatives can create opportunities for elders and younger generations to interact, share knowledge, and reflect on their cultural heritage. Ultimately, this experience suggests that cultural revitalization does not necessarily

require returning entirely to past ways of life. Instead, it involves recognizing the values embedded within traditional practices and creating new contexts in which these values can continue to be shared. Activities such as community workshops, artistic documentation, and public engagement can therefore play an important role in strengthening cultural awareness and supporting the transmission of heritage to future generations.

Discussion

This research set out to explore how craft-based intergenerational activities, particularly wool practices, can help reconnect communities and support cultural and social sustainability in contemporary contexts. The findings in my research clearly demonstrate that traditional crafts in Central Hunza were not simply techniques of making but functioned as organic social infrastructures and spaces where relationships, values, and knowledge were continuously produced and sustained. Their gradual disappearance, therefore, is not only a loss of skill but a disruption of the social systems that once held the community together. This study argues that reactivating such practices, even in small and adapted forms, can play a critical role in rebuilding intergenerational connections and fostering culturally grounded forms of sustainability.

The findings reveal that craft practices historically operated at the intersection of daily life, social interaction, and ecological knowledge. With many other crafts Wool processing and weaving were embedded within routines of living, where learning happened through observation, participation, and shared responsibility. This directly reflects broader understandings of cultural sustainability, which extend beyond the preservation of tangible heritage to include lived practices and knowledge systems (Soini & Birkeland, 2014).

However, what evidence I noticed through this research is that the current discourse on cultural sustainability often underestimates the social function of practices like crafts. In Hunza, crafts were not separate cultural activities, they were the very means through which community life was organized. Their decline has therefore contributed to weakening social bonds, reducing opportunities for intergenerational interaction, and disconnecting people from local materials and ecological systems. This gap between cultural representation and lived experience is particularly visible in the context of tourism. While traditional crafts are still displayed and sold, the processes, relationships, and knowledge systems behind them are increasingly absent. This reinforces the argument that cultural sustainability cannot be achieved through preservation alone; it requires innovation and the continuation of practice in new forms.

Another significant key insight is that intergenerational learning in Hunza was historically not structured or formalized; it was embedded in everyday life. Children learned by being present,

observing elders, and gradually participating in activities such as farming, storytelling, and craft-making. This aligns with Larkin's (2004) understanding of intergenerational relationships as foundational to both individual development and community cohesion. The absence of such shared spaces today has disrupted these learning processes. However, the workshop conducted during this research demonstrated that this gap is not irreversible. When children were given the opportunity to engage with wool and interact with elders, they responded with curiosity and enthusiasm. This suggests that the issue is not a lack of interest, but rather the absence of environments where such interactions can take place.

From my own perspective as both a researcher and a member of the community, this became particularly visible when wool was introduced, conversations began to flow naturally. Elders shared memories without being prompted, and children engaged through touch, questions, and experimentation. It was not just a learning activity but a possible way to reconstruct a social environment. This creates an opportunity for revitalization of heritage through wool innovation as Huhmarniemi (2021) explains that revitalization can be intergenerational and intercultural, where crafting methods and symbols carry cultural memory and help transmit local knowledge to new generations. Similarly, Hernández Cervantes and Huhmarniemi (2023) describe craft as carrying the "soul" of culture and argue that heritage can continue through collaboration, co-design, and reinterpretation rather than simple preservation. These ideas strongly resonated with my fieldwork in Hunza, where I used wool to create the space while bring the community a little closer. This reinforces the idea that intergenerational learning is something which must be experienced collectively. As M. Ivery (2017) while talking about a project for Nova Scotia Gaelic Cultural revitalization says that we should interact with cultural values, identity, and artistic traditions, rather than passively observe them.



Figure 35. Reema (researcher) sitting with grandmothers during the workshop. Photograph by Nadeem Alkarimi, 2025.

The findings of this research also highlight a significant shift in Hunza from collective, community-oriented ways of living toward more individualized and market-driven lifestyles. This transformation reflects broader global patterns of socio-economic change, where processes such as modernization, globalization, and technological advancement reshape cultural values, social relationships, and everyday practices (Yeganeh, 2024). As societies become more integrated into global economic systems, there is often a gradual movement from collectivist structures toward individualistic orientations, where personal goals, economic productivity, and consumption take precedence over shared responsibilities and communal life.

In earlier generations in Hunza, daily life was organized around collective practices. Activities such as agriculture, food preparation, animal care, and craft-making functioned as social spaces where relationships were maintained and strengthened. These practices created regular and meaningful opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and mutual support. As Larkin (2004) suggests, such shared environments are central to maintaining intergenerational relationships and community cohesion, as they allow knowledge, values, and social norms to be transmitted through participation rather than instruction.

However, the findings indicate that many of these shared practices have been replaced by market-based consumption and more individualized routines particularly in Central Hunza. Many goods and farm vegetables that were once produced locally are now purchased from external markets, and daily activities are increasingly structured around work schedules, education, and significant digital engagement. This shift has reduced self-sufficiency as well as the frequency and depth of social interaction within the community. As Clammer (2015) argues, development processes that prioritize economic growth without considering cultural dimensions often lead to the erosion of social relationships and the weakening of community-based ways of life. In this sense, the transformation observed is not simply economic but deeply cultural, affecting how people relate to one another and to their environment.

The decline of craft practices is particularly significant within this broader transformation and wool-based heritage itself is increasingly under threat globally. As local systems of production disappear, so too do the environments in which people once gathered, collaborated, and learned collectively. For example, M. Huhmarniemi et al. (2025) discuss how in Arctic regions wool is often treated as waste despite long traditions of sheep farming and wool craftsmanship. Their research explores how heritage crafts and art education can support ecological thinking, innovation, and cultural sustainability. Craft practices were embedded within a wider eco-cultural system that connected people to land, materials, and seasonal rhythms. StollSørmo and Gårdvik (2022) describe this relationship through the concept of eco-culture, where cultural knowledge is inseparable from ecological understanding and lived experience. In Hunza, wool practices were closely connected to animal care, farming, agriculture, and everyday relationships with the land. However, with modern development, wool has not been explored as a learning medium in formal settings, and as a result, sheep farming has largely disappeared. For example, there used to be at least five sheep in our own home when I was a child, and in most households in my neighborhood, and I personally helped my mother take care of them. Over time, however, these practices gradually declined and eventually disappeared. Their disappearance therefore represents not only a loss of skill but also a disruption of relationships with land, nature, and the craft practices that were once deeply embedded in everyday life.

This shift also reflects what Soini and Birkeland (2014) identify as a key challenge in cultural sustainability: the tendency to focus on preserving visible or tangible aspects of culture while neglecting the everyday practices and social processes that give them meaning. In Hunza, cultural identity continues to be expressed through festivals, tourism, and material objects, women empowered yet the underlying systems of knowledge transmission and community interaction are weakening. This creates a situation where culture is increasingly represented rather than lived. At the same time, the research reveals that cultural identity and pride remain strong among community members. This is an important finding, as it suggests that we can not simply say that cultural transformation is a process of loss, it is more complex and a process of negotiation and adaptation. As Yeganeh (2024) notes, the interaction between global and local values does not lead to complete cultural homogenization; instead, it produces complex and sometimes contradictory outcomes where traditional and modern values coexist.

This creates a critical opportunity for cultural revitalization. Instead of returning to an idealized past, the focus can shift toward reimagining traditional practices in ways that are relevant to contemporary life. As Huhmarniemi and Jokela (2020) argue, revitalization is not about preserving culture in a fixed or “authentic” form it is about interpreting and adapting it in response to present conditions. In this context, craft practices can be reactivated as living processes that continue to evolve while maintaining their social and cultural significance. From my fieldwork, it became clear that knowledge itself is there, but we are missing the spaces and contexts in which this knowledge can be practiced and shared. The disappearance of everyday cultural spaces such as communal work environments, shared domestic activities, and informal gathering points has limited opportunities for interaction across generations. This suggests that efforts toward cultural sustainability should focus on preserving knowledge as well as on recreating the social conditions that allow that knowledge to exist and be transmitted.

The workshop and documentary film developed in this research functioned as active sites of cultural engagement and knowledge production. Together, they demonstrate how arts-based approaches can create meaningful spaces for reconnecting people, practices, and narratives. The workshop, in particular, highlighted the importance of participation. By bringing elders and children together around a shared activity, it recreated a form of collective experience that is

largely absent in contemporary life. The focus to enable interaction through conversation, memory, and shared presence. This aligns with community-based approaches to cultural sustainability, which emphasize the importance of local participation and knowledge holders (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018).

The documentary film extends this process beyond the immediate moment of the workshop. The film captures the emotional, relational, and experiential dimensions of these interactions. I understand it as a form of visual ethnography and participatory cultural production. It captures relational and affective dimensions of interaction that written analysis cannot fully express gestures, silences, emotions, beauty of imperfections, and the embodied engagement with wool. In this sense, the film becomes a situated form of knowledge production that works through emotion, memory, and perception, not only interpretation. From my perspective, the film also serves another important role: it challenges dominant representations of culture in Hunza. While tourism often presents culture as static and aesthetic, the film reveals it as dynamic, lived, and relational. It brings forward voices and experiences that are often overlooked, particularly those of elders and women whose knowledge is central to cultural continuity.

The film also functions as a contemporary archive. Rather than preserving objects separated from their social context, it documents living interactions, oral histories, and embodied practices within the community itself. Dan Ben-Amos (2023) argues that cultural objects displayed in museums lose the ability to function as they do within their original cultural environments. In this sense, the film is a medium of reflection and dialogue. It has the potential to circulate within the community, prompting conversations about change, loss, and possibility. This expands the impact of the research beyond academic contexts and situates it within the community itself. The findings of this research suggest that craft-based intergenerational activities should be understood not as supplementary cultural practices but as critical mechanisms for sustaining social and cultural life. They provide a tangible way to reconnect generations, revive local knowledge, and create spaces for shared experience.

However, the research also makes it clear that one-time interventions are not sufficient. The workshop demonstrated what is possible, but it also highlighted the need for continuity. For such

initiatives to have lasting impact, they must be integrated into ongoing community practices, supported by local organizations, and adapted to contemporary contexts. For designers, researchers, and community practitioners, this points toward the importance of creating participatory, place-based, and culturally grounded approaches. The focus should be on working with existing knowledge systems and creating conditions where they can be reactivated and sustained.

More broadly, this research contributes to the understanding of cultural sustainability by emphasizing the role of everyday practices. It suggests that sustainability is not only about preserving heritage or developing policies but about maintaining the social environments where culture is lived and transmitted. This study demonstrates that the decline of craft practices in Hunza is closely tied to broader social transformations, including the weakening of community bonds and intergenerational relationships. At the same time, it shows that these practices still hold significant potential for reconnecting people and supporting cultural continuity.

Through the workshop and documentary film, this research illustrates that even small, carefully designed interventions can create meaningful spaces for interaction and reflection. These spaces allow culture to be experienced, shared, and reinterpreted in ways that are relevant to contemporary life. Ultimately, cultural sustainability should involve recognizing the value of traditional practices and finding ways to integrate them into present and future contexts. Craft-based intergenerational activities offer one such pathway, one that is grounded in participation, relationships, and lived experience. They matter today not because they represent tradition, but because they provide a way to rebuild the social connections that sustain culture itself.

Conclusion

This research set out to explore how craft-based intergenerational activities, particularly wool practices, can help reconnect communities and support cultural and social sustainability in Hunza. Through fieldwork, conversations with community members, and the organization of a participatory workshop, I sought to understand not only what has changed within the community, but also what possibilities still exist for rebuilding connections through cultural practices. The findings of this study show that traditional crafts in Hunza were never isolated skills or economic activities. They functioned as part of a larger social system where learning, interaction, and relationships were embedded in everyday life. Practices such as wool processing, weaving, and other forms of collective work created natural spaces for intergenerational exchange, where children learned by observing and participating alongside elders. These practices also strengthened social bonds, reinforced shared values, and maintained a close relationship with the natural environment.

However, the research also highlights that these systems have significantly changed over time. Processes of modernization, economic development, and increasing dependence on external markets have shifted the community from a largely self-sufficient and collective way of living toward more individualized and consumption-based lifestyles. As a result, many of the everyday spaces where people once gathered, worked together, and learned from one another have gradually disappeared. The decline of craft practices is therefore not only a loss of material knowledge but also a loss of social environments that supported community cohesion and cultural continuity.

At the same time, this research demonstrates that the potential for connection still exists. Through the workshop, I observed that when elders and children were brought together around a shared activity, meaningful interactions emerged naturally. The act of working with wool created a space where stories were shared, questions were asked, and relationships were formed. This suggests that the gap between generations is not due to a lack of interest, but rather the absence of opportunities for engagement. The documentary film developed as part of this research further extends this understanding. It captures moments of interaction, memory, and emotion that are difficult to express through written text alone. For me, the film became a way to not only

document but also communicate the lived experiences of the community. It reflects how cultural practices are not static, but are shaped through relationships, voices, and everyday interactions. By sharing these stories, the film also aims to create awareness within the community about the importance of preserving and re-engaging with these practices in new ways.

Reflecting on the research objectives, this study has explored cultural heritage and social values that once sustained community life, examined how these have changed over time, and tested the potential of a craft-based workshop as a method for fostering intergenerational connection. It also engaged the community through both participatory practice and artistic output, particularly the film, as a way of initiating dialogue around cultural sustainability. This research concludes that craft-based intergenerational activities can serve as meaningful tools for reconnecting communities, but only when they are understood as more than heritage practices. They must be seen as social processes that create opportunities for interaction, learning, and shared experience. Reviving such practices does not mean returning to the past but rather reinterpreting them in ways that are relevant to present realities.

From my own perspective, this research has been both an academic and personal journey. Being from Hunza, I have witnessed these changes over time, but engaging with elders, listening to their stories, and creating spaces for dialogue allowed me to understand these transformations more deeply. It also made me realize that cultural sustainability is not something that can be achieved through preservation alone. It requires active participation, reflection, and a willingness to create new forms of connection. In conclusion, this study suggests that the future of cultural sustainability in Hunza lies not in holding onto traditions as fixed forms, but in creating opportunities where culture can continue to be lived, shared, and reimagined. Craft practices, when approached as participatory and relational activities, offer one such pathway. They provide a way to bring generations together, reconnect people with their environment, and rebuild the social fabric that sustains cultural life.

AI acknowledgment

I have used artificial intelligence tools; ChatGPT and NotebookLLM as a supportive resource during the writing process of this thesis. These tools were used to assist in improving the clarity, structure, and academic tone of the text, as well as to support the refinement of language. In addition, I used AI assistance as a supplementary aid in reflecting on and organizing parts of my data analysis. However, all interpretations, findings, and final analytical decisions remain my own responsibility.

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Appendix: Consent Form

This appendix includes the informed consent form used during fieldwork in Hunza. It was provided to all participants before interviews and workshop participation. Consent was obtained in written or verbal form, depending on participant preference and literacy levels. All consent forms are securely stored as part of the ethical documentation of this research.

Project Title: *Rediscovering the Social and Cultural Heritage of Hunza*

Researcher: Reema Babar, Master's Student, Sustainable Arts and Design
Institution: University of Lapland, Finland

Purpose of the Workshop:

You are invited to participate in a community-based workshop that is part of a Master's thesis project at the University of Lapland. This project aims to explore how traditional crafts and cultural practices in Hunza can support social and environmental sustainability. The workshop includes activities such as wool spinning, weaving, and intergenerational storytelling to help reconnect the community with its cultural roots.

Audio and Video Recording:

The workshop will be audio- and video-recorded to document the research process. These recordings may be used in a short research film, which could be shared on the official channels of the University of Lapland and used in academic presentations or publications. Your name will not be used unless you provide explicit permission. If you prefer not to appear in video or photos, you are still welcome to participate in the workshop.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this workshop is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you, including photographs, audio, or video will not be used in the research or any resulting publications.

Consent Statement:

By signing this form, you confirm that you have read and understood the information provided. You give permission for your participation to be recorded and for your image and voice to be used in connection with the research film and related academic work. You understand that the recordings may be published on the official platforms of the University of Lapland.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

(For participants under 18, parent/guardian consent is required below)

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____