Geoforum 178 (2027) 104885

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

Crafting post-growth? A support-structure diagnosis of Jaipur's craft economy

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Craft economy
Post-growth
Support structures
Transition
Jaipur

ABSTRACT

Post-growth scholarship has often celebrated craft as a privileged site for imagining postcapitalist and post-growth transitions. Yet this discussion remains largely Global North-centred and empirically underdeveloped, drawing mostly on small-scale, elective and niche craft economies rather than large craft sectors where artisanal labour constitutes a major livelihood system. This paper addresses this gap through the case of Jaipur's craft economy, one of the world's largest concentrated craft economies. The study draws on semi-structured interviews with craft-sector experts, field visits to craft fairs and markets, participant observation at a socio-ecological enterprise, and documentary analysis conducted between 2023 and 2024. We examine how Jaipur's craft sector enables, constrains and complicates post-growth-compatible forms of territorial development. To do so, we develop a support-structure diagnosis, understood as an analysis of the institutional, material, financial, cultural, geographical and historical conditions sustaining, transforming or absorbing craft economies into dominant growth-oriented circuits. We map three interrelated support structures operating across multiple scales: top-down institutional structures, bottom-up and intermediary structures, and local conditions. The article shows that Jaipur's large-scale, decentralised and historically embedded craft economy unsettles simple distinctions between local and global, formal and informal, traditional and entrepreneurial. It requires a more situated understanding of relocalisation, alterity and market integration in post-growth debates. We identify four dynamics through which support structures interact: encouragement, collaboration, suppression and friction. Theoretically, equity, central to post-growth economies, remains a concern for Jaipur. Scale, heterogeneity of informalisation and decentralisation, and multiple axes of power in Jaipur's craft ecosystem open up a productive challenge for post-growth scholarship.

1. Introduction

Finding new, sustainable modalities of territorial development is among the thorniest issues of our time. Ecological crises, (neo)colonial dependencies, fragile trade agreements and trade wars, vulnerable supply chains, unprecedented disasters, and severe signs of uneconomic growth (Varvarousis et al., 2025) put the growth-driven neoliberal paradigm into question and demand multiscalar changes. Such alternative modes of territorial development have been discussed as part of a larger class of transition discourses (TDs) (Audet, 2016; Avelino et al., 2016). Among these transition discourses, this article focuses on post-growth, understood as a research agenda concerned with the transition towards societies that do not treat GDP growth as their primary objective, but instead seek to enhance social wellbeing while reducing socio-metabolic throughput and without shifting the social and ecological costs of this transition to other places, near and far (Kallis et al., 2018; Kallis et al., 2025). Post-growth is relevant here because it challenges the linearity of progress, the assumption of economic growth as an answer to all social, economic, and even environmental impasses, and the naturalisation of the Western development model and coloniality as the sole destiny of the world's economies (Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel, 2021). It also questions the green growth ideal, which has been strongly contested on both feasibility and desirability grounds (Hickel, 2021; Kallis, 2025). Through the critical lens of post-growth, we examine Jaipur's craft economy as a large-scale, emblematic Global South craft territory, through which the relationship between craft, growth, and

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2026.104885
Received 30 January 2026; Received in revised form 10 October 2026; Accepted 12 October 2026
Available online 20 October 2026
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post-growth can be assessed beyond the niche examples that usually dominate the literature. We ask how its support structures enable, constrain and complicate post-growth-compatible forms of territorial development.

Jaipur, the capital of the Western Indian state of Rajasthan, is considered the "Mecca" of craftsmanship. Designated as UNESCO's Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art, Jaipur is home to around 53,500 workshops and more than 175,000 artisans (UNESCO, 2018). Thus, it constitutes an emblematic large-scale case for examining the relationship between the craft sector and post-growth transitions. Craft economies have been widely discussed as an 'alternative to capitalist models of consumption and production' as well as part of the solution to the multidimensional crisis of our times (Luckman, 2015; Sennett, 2008; Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p. 2). Furthermore, post-growth literature acknowledges craft enterprises for their focus on the micro-politics of work and human involvement in production, rather than mechanised, efficiency-driven methods. This resonates with core principles of post-growth and postcapitalist discourse, such as prioritising ecological sustainability and localised human engagement over traditional GDP-based growth metrics (Rennstam and Paulsson, 2024; Rennstem, 2021; Vincent and Brandellero, 2023). This literature usually attends to the sensory and dialogic experience of the craft maker's body and mind with the material of work, imagining craft work as a choice associated with freedom and autonomy at work, and with the development of meaningful relationships with consumers. Hence, this craft-oriented post-growth literature has largely prioritised artisanal-making economies revived in the Global North (GN), where craft often appears as a grassroots pushback against fast, industrialised and growth-oriented capitalist production (Carr & Gibson, 2016; Gibson, 2016; Gowan & Slocum, 2014; Thurnell-Read, 2014; Yarrow & Jones, 2014). This emphasis has made craft a privileged site for imagining post-growth production. Still, it has limited the debate to cases where craft is relatively small-scale, elective and often framed as an alternative lifestyle or ethical market practice.

This limitation becomes especially visible in the Global South (GS), where craft labour is not a niche economic activity but an everyday reality of a considerable part of the population. The task of seeing these GS craft economies through a post-growth perspective is particularly important because they are often situated in growth-obsessed, rapidly industrialising and urbanising countries such as India. Here, century-old craft industries, though the second-largest livelihood-generating sector after agriculture (Shrivastava, 2018), are considered inferior, backward, and even primitive, and are often cast aside as peripheral and irrelevant (Tyabji, 2007; Uzramma, 2017). Our starting point is the tension between post-growth tendencies and growth-oriented dynamics within such large craft economies. Although these economies may exhibit features associated with post-growth spatial development, including autonomous and localised production, low throughput, less energy-intensive technologies, and the use of local resources (Kaika et al., 2023; Savini et al., 2022), post-growth scholarship has paid little attention to the large-scale craft economies of Central and Latin America, Africa, South and Southeast Asia. This omission creates a series of problems for both craft-economy scholarship and post-growth. For the former, not examining the craft sector through a post-growth lens hinders understanding of how traditional economies can be appreciated and contribute to broader positive social change. In addition, overlooking how the capitalist regime of economic growth can transform and alienate the craft economic sector prevents a more holistic understanding of how labour relations within the sector become more exploitative (Rai, 2022), how feudal gender roles are reinforced (Acharya, 2003), and how the overall craft economy changes to respond to mass-produced market demands (Scrase, 2003). It also ignores how caste-based labour and production ethics are negotiated through diverse economic practices that resist homogenising capitalist logics and foreground situated, historically embedded feudal modes of craft-making (Mukhopadhyay, 2023). Likewise, in the post-growth literature, failing to engage with such craft economies of scale reinforces the tendency to focus on small-scale alternatives, limiting its capacity to understand larger-scale, socially embedded, and historically inherited transition pathways (Varvarousis et al., 2025). Moreover, critique of growth-centred development and alternative economic pathways such as peasant- and artisan-based village cooperative economies with selective technological use have long formed part of GS intellectual and political histories, which we would like to reconnect with the contemporary post-growth debates (Gerber & Raina, 2018).

In this article, we address this research demand by examining how Jaipur's craft economy enables, constrains, and complicates post-growth-compatible forms of territorial development. To do so, we explore the mechanisms and support structures operating across municipal, regional, and national scales that shape the post-growth potential of craft-based development. We also identify contrary dynamics: mechanisms that absorb the craft sector and turn it into another component of India's rapidly expanding, growth-oriented economic apparatus (Scrase, 2003; Tokas et al., 2022). Jaipur's case therefore allows us to examine how transition discourses are negotiated within large-scale GS craft economies, where post-growth tendencies coexist with growth-oriented pressures. This speaks directly to recent calls in post-growth research for greater attention to the politics of transition and to the transformation of Global North–Global South relations (Kallis et al., 2025). We draw on the broader research agenda of Real-Existing Degrowth (RED) (Kallis et al., 2022; Gilbert et al., 2026; Varvarousis et al., forthcoming), which seeks to study degrowth-relevant dynamics in real places rather than only as future-oriented normative scenarios. We use RED as an empirical orientation, operationalised through a support-structure diagnosis. For the purposes of this enquiry, we distinguish three types of support structures: top-down, bottom-up and intermediary, and geographically specific local conditions. We argue that a careful examination of this tripartite constellation of support structures, together with their contradictory dynamics, can help assess the conditions under which Jaipur's craft sector may foster, distort or suppress post-growth transitions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section Two reviews the literature on post-growth and craft economies and identifies the research gaps that this article aims to address. It also situates the article within the broader RED research agenda and explains how support-structure diagnosis operationalises this orientation. Section Three presents Jaipur's craft economy as a large-scale and historically embedded craft territory marked by alterity within integration. Section Four explains the research approach, methodology, and the use of support structures as the study's diagnostic framework. Section Five maps Jaipur's support structures and examines how they enable, encourage, create friction, suppress, distort or absorb post-growth-compatible possibilities. Section Six discusses what the Jaipur case reveals about post-growth debates on craft along the axes of scale, power, and equity, before concluding with lines for future research.

2. Craft and post-growth: the need for a Global South perspective

Post-growth and crafts have rarely been explored together. Rennstam and Paulsson (2024) recently developed a conceptual account of how craft-oriented production and consumption relate to post-growth. They argue that post-growth focuses on sufficiency rather than optimisation, conviviality rather than competition, and relocalisation rather than dispersed carbon footprints. Craft economies are often seen as embodying these features, centring ecological healing and minimising environmental impacts in comparison to industrial and brand-oriented economies (Pacholok, 2023). Both post-growth and crafts focus on greater human autonomy and connection, ascribing value to skilled human labour over mechanisation and mass-standardised production (Adamson, 2010; Gibson, 2016; Munro & O'Kane, 2022; Thurnell-Read, 2014). The 'cosmolocalism movement', a model for post-

growth production, integrates crafts, whereby the global circulation of design and knowledge alongside the localised fabrication offers a model that reduces ecological footprints while enabling more distributed and context-sensitive modes of production (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p. 3). Finally, the post-growth emphasis on social wellbeing rather than perpetual economic growth aligns with craft work's ability to engage body and mind in a long-term, attentive spell (Sennett, 2008). The convergence of these fields suggests that craft-oriented practices operationalise post-growth ideals through three main dimensions: a. A reevaluation of efficiency, emphasising quality and sustainability over speed and volume in production processes; b. Labour-intensive practices which value human skills, conviviality (Illich, 1973) and creativity, leading to meaningful employment and reduced reliance on automation; c. Localised production and consumption that strengthen community resilience, enhance producer–consumer sociability and reduce environmental footprints by focusing on local resources and market relations.

While this discussion positions craft-oriented practices as tangible expressions of post-growth ideals, it also risks idealising the craft sector by projecting onto it an excessive potential to realise post-growth futures. With a few exceptions that caution us against the self-exploitation of creatives, gendered craft labour, and the allure of cool capitalism (Luckman, 2015; Vincent & Brandellero, 2023), such imaginaries often essentialise GN craft conditions and overlook the uneven spatial and social realities through which these futures are enacted. Consequently, the vision of contemporary craft-focused post-growth can appear detached from the material and social conditions of craft production, especially when it overlooks the diverse conditions and constraints faced by different types of craft economies, whether maker-designer, heritage-artisanal, traditional, or commercialised, particularly in the Global South.

A Global South perspective requires a different starting point. Global South craft economies have long resisted and adapted to dominant growth-centric models. According to Berg (2014), crafts have evolved through five key stages in response to global economic changes: 1) integration into pre-colonial and early colonial trade networks with proto-industrial craft production; 2) colonial disruption and deindustrialisation leading to a decline and restructuring in artisanal employment; 3) postcolonial industrialisation that marginalised crafts, prompting informalisation as strategic adaptation; 4) neoliberal globalisation fostering flexible specialisation and craft revival through niche markets, tourism and diasporic consumption in hybrid forms; 5) contemporary entrepreneurial craft economies drawing on digital platforms and translocal networks. These stages are crucial for understanding the potential of large GS craft economies to contribute to post-growth transformations without romanticising their social relations, market dependencies or historical constraints.

Craft economies in South Asia, East Asia, and parts of Africa were historically embedded in global trade networks, with artisanal production, such as Gujarat's textiles, Chinese ceramics, and West African metalwork, serving both local household economies and international markets through elite patronage and merchant networks (Berg, 2014). From the seventeenth century onward, regions like Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast, and Bengal in India were central to global trade via the Dutch and English East India Companies, private traders, intermediaries, brokers, and local merchants. Colonialism disrupted these economies through deindustrialisation, driven by industrial goods imports, raw material extraction, and the orientalisation of crafts as exotic artefacts (Bagchi, 1976). This process redefined and reclassified the utility value of crafts, transforming them into exotic objects suited for museums and imperial displays (McGowan, 2009). Yet, small-scale production persisted, particularly in textiles, adapting through flexible specialisation and informal labour structures (Ray, 2015; Roy, 1999). Craft skills have also been reproduced and sustained under colonial-capitalist modernisation (Rai, 2022). During anti-colonial movements, crafts were revalorised and woven with modernity as symbols of national identity (Guha-Thakurta, 1992). Postcolonial industrialisation planning relied heavily upon the labour-intensive artisanal sector. For instance, in India, there is a call to strengthen the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector, through which 11 million skilled craft workers secure their livelihoods (Sethi, 2019). Craft as a tool for livelihood generation and local economic development is widely discussed (Jain, 2019). The field has primarily focused on demographic development (women's livelihoods), geographic development (rural revitalisation in sub-Saharan Africa), tourism development in South Africa and Southeast Asia, and sustainable development (circular economy and cleaner production materials) (Bellver et al., 2023; Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022). Developing states' governmentality further sustains these economies by providing microcredit, subsidies, and tax exemptions, among others, thus sustaining a subsistence economy without integrating it into an accumulation economy (Mukhopadhyay, 2023). Nevertheless, the knock-on effects of liberalisation and globalisation have made the handicraft economy and craft workers in the Global South more precarious and fractured than ever before (Ganguly-Scrase, 2001). The push for market competitiveness and export-oriented production has intensified informalisation, eroded labour protections, and made artisans vulnerable to fluctuating demand, exploitation by intermediaries, and cultural commodification.

These theoretical perspectives reveal three key contemporary insights. First, scholars acknowledge that globalisation and the expansion of capitalism have left the craft sector weak and fragmented (Scrase, 2003). Even so, this largely undervalued sector has the potential to be developed in ways that benefit bottom-of-the-pyramid craft producers and generate employment (Dalal et al., 2023). In such contexts, we recognise that the problem is not the sector's economic growth, but whether existing forms of growth and development improve livelihood security, advance redistributive justice, and strengthen artisan autonomy over production. We do not pose growth and post-growth as binary categories. Following Gerber and Raina's (2018) argument on applying post-growth ideas in GS, we propose that a higher rate of GDP-led growth does not necessarily reduce underdevelopment; rather, it might exacerbate income inequality. Second, research shows that most craft workers are women or belong to lower-income and marginalised social groups, which complicates efforts to fully incorporate craft production into a standard capitalist model (Krishnaraj, 1992; Majumder, 2021; Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Wilkinson-Weber, 2004). Third, a 'moral economy' approach emphasises the potential for crafts to contribute to a sustainable, local, and resilient economic system (D'Costa, 2022). Together, these approaches implicitly frame crafts as aligned with post-growth principles by prioritising ecological sustainability, community wellbeing, and slower forms of production over market expansion. Yet evaluation of this alignment remains mostly implicit. An analytical account is missing of the conditions under which craft economies support, compromise, or contradict post-growth possibilities.

The current craft 'revival' moment attempts to recentre crafts through the convergence of these three trends: it seeks to generate sustainable livelihoods and social mobility for marginalised artisans, often mediated and facilitated by government policies, designers, NGOs and digital platforms (DeNicola & DeNicola, 2012; Kapur et al., 2022; Reubens & Kachru, 2024; Wilkinson & DeNicola, 2024). The market reach of the revived craft economies, at once entrepreneurial and heritage-based, also draws on the global supply chain and demonstrates creative resilience (Cadène, 2022), whereby craftspeople seek to claim the position of knowledge worker (De Munck, 2019). Yet it keeps the integration-isolation dilemma of crafts alive, i.e., whether to integrate craft production and consumption more closely with capitalist economic circuits or maintain a niche, localised alternative economy geared towards postcapitalist futures.

Despite the craft revival moment and the growing interest in craft economies within post-growth and sustainability discourses, there is little research on how crafts may support, compromise or contradict post-growth possibilities in specific geographies. Moreover, there is

limited attention to the composite role of state policies, civil society, design institutions, and digital platforms in fostering or hindering such transformations. Particularly in the GS, where craft economies operate within diverse logics of informality, heritage, and market integration, these support structures play a crucial role in shaping crafts' trajectories. This article addresses this gap through the emblematic case of Jaipur's craft economy.

3. Jaipur's craft economy: alterity within integration

Unlike niche or marginal craft clusters, Jaipur's craft economy operates at significant economic and spatial scales. With 53,000 workshops and more than 175,000 artisans, it is one of the largest concentrated craft economies globally and a major contributor to regional employment and Rajasthan's handicraft exports, which rank among the state's top economic sectors (see Table 5). For a sector of this scale, sustained by a low-income and marginalised workforce, including historically marginalised castes and women, economic expansion may be necessary from a livelihood perspective, but the critical question is what form of expansion would ensure that benefits are distributed. This scale is further reflected in the density of specialised craft clusters discussed in Section 5. Its globally recognised heritage, deep historical embeddedness, and contemporary design transformations make it a particularly useful case for examining how artisanal production navigates between tradition and market integration. In 2015, the World Crafts Council (WCC) declared it a 'World Craft City,' the only city at the time to receive the title for more than one craft (R. Singh, 2015).

Jaipur is the capital of Rajasthan, the largest state in India by area. A unique convergence of planned urbanism, royal patronage, and trans-regional trade has historically shaped Jaipur's craft economy. Founded in 1727 with a meticulous planning approach, Jaipur is considered India's first planned city, unlike other medieval cities, which grew organically over time. Envisaged as a trade and commerce centre, the main avenues of the city were designed as markets (*bazaars*), and special royal invitations were sent to merchants, traders, craftsmen and artisans from as far as Bengal in the east and Persia (Iran) in the West to settle in the city (UNESCO, 2018). Jaipur's renowned '36 karkhanas' (workshops) institutionalised craft production at scale, and the specialised craft bazaars embedded a craft ecology into the city's spatial, morphological and economic fabric as an integral local support system. The karkhana concept, popularised by the Mughal Sultanate, became a large-scale employment hub for diverse crafts and, later, under Sawai Jai Singh II, these workshops catered to both the royal family and the broader community (Nagar Nigam Jaipur Heritage, n.d.). The legacy of structured artisanal labour suffered under British rule as high taxes on the village economy and cheap machine-made products captured the market. Moreover, caste-based discrimination, alongside entrenched cultural norms, has historically restricted the emergence of innovative entrepreneurial practices within craft-based communities in India. These socio-cultural constraints have shaped who can participate in entrepreneurial activities, often marginalising lower-caste artisans and limiting their access to resources, networks, and recognition (Dana, 2000). Post-independence, without royal patronage, the *karkhanas* were closed (Craft Revival Trust, 2016). The liberalisation of India in the 1990 s further impacted the craft industry adversely (Chauhan, 2021), accelerating the disintegration of the village economy based on craft production and ushering in a new era of mechanised, industrial production, further forcing crafts to integrate more deeply into capitalist production or risk losing relevance. Thus, the city has a legacy of negotiating with shifting economic regimes.

Currently, Jaipur's crafts, such as hand block printing, have increasingly shifted from socially and culturally embedded practices toward more commercialised forms of production (Tokas et al., 2022). Crafts once rooted in local knowledge, shared across communities, and oriented toward social needs have, in many cases, become part of growth-centric value chains mediated by external market actors, including intermediaries, brands, and exporters. However, some significant Jaipur crafts still depend on local raw materials. For example, blue pottery is made with glass powder, multani soil, borax, and gum. Handmade paper units use recycled paper, rags, and agricultural fibres, and the Bagru block printing cluster is famous for its use of vegetable dyes derived from fruit peels, leaves, molasses, and other organic materials (Gaatha, n.d.). These material continuities show that commercialisation has not erased the territorial embeddedness of Jaipur's crafts, even as it has reworked their social and economic organisation. Table 1 illustrates the scale and diversity of Jaipur's craft economy. Rather than a marginal or alternative sector, craft appears here as a primary livelihood system for a large population, organised through a wide variety of materials, skills and production methods.

Jaipur reflects a complex interplay of commercialisation, heritage preservation and socio-cultural embeddedness. As a major urban centre with a globally recognised craft heritage, particularly in hand block printing, gemstone work, and blue pottery, Jaipur exemplifies how artisanal production operates at a significant economic and spatial scale, far beyond the small, isolated craft clusters often imagined in post-growth literature. Yet the persistence of caste-based labour divisions, gendered roles, and intergenerational knowledge systems lends Jaipur's craft sector a degree of alterity. This distinctiveness resists easy assimilation into capitalist or industrial logics while negotiating and partially transforming capitalist imperatives from within. As demonstrated above, community-based knowledge systems, local resources and intergenerational labour retain ecological and cultural specificity, even as they are reorganised through market-facing industries. This duality of integration into capitalist circuits and resistance through embedded knowledge practices positions Jaipur as a site of what we term 'alterity within integration', challenging binary framings of growth and post-growth.

Moreover, in Jaipur, craft is not merely an economic activity; it is deeply woven into the city's identity, tourism economy, and everyday cultural imaginary. Jaipur's crafts survive by holding the tension between tradition and modernity, generating employment and sustaining a regional identity-based economy. Yet, they are often framed as backward or underdeveloped within dominant development discourses (Tyabji, 2007). Therefore, exploring Jaipur's expansive craft sector through a post-growth lens is not merely an academic exercise but also a political task of revaluing craft economies often marginalised by dominant development narratives. Finally, Jaipur's craft economy complicates dominant post-growth imaginaries that often draw from GN

Table 1
Material Ecologies of Jaipur Crafts. Source: compiled by authors from District Industries Centre, Jaipur, 2017; D'source, n.d.; Gaatha, n.d.; Map Academy, n.d.; Rana, 2021.

Materials	Craft Forms
Textile and Ornamentation	Tie & Dye, Laheriya, Bandhej, Sanganeri and Bagru hand block printing, Warak printing Embroidery – Gota Patti, Zari, Kinari, Zardozi, Mukaish, Sindhi, Suf, Kharak, Applique, Patchwork
Lacquer	Lac bangles, motifs and coating on decorative items
Metal	Nakkashi – metal engraving, decorative crafts, utensils
Gems and Jewellery	Gemstone carving, Kundan Meena, Silver Meenakari, Patwa thread jewellery, Thewa jewellery
Paintings	Pichwai, Phad, Miniature, Mandana painting, mud-mirror work
Rugs, Quilts	Hand-knotted and hand-woven rugs, carpets, dhurries, Galicha, Namda, Jaipur Razai – 100 g, 250 g cotton quilts
Clay	Clay pottery, blue pottery, terracotta
Wood	Tarkashi – wood inlay, engraving, carving, Kaavad
Paper	Sanganer Kagaz – paper making, stationery, and decorative items, Kites, Sanjhi Art – paper cutting
Leather	Mojari, Nagra- leather shoes, Leather bags, wallets, purses and trunks
Stone	Marble and Granite sculpture
Mixed	Puppetry

contexts. Its scale, embeddedness, and contradictions offer a more plural and situated understanding of post-growth transitions in the GS. Jaipur shows how craft economies negotiate capitalist logics while retaining distinct socio-cultural and ecological values, though always through uneven relations of power, labour, and market dependence.

4. Research approach and methodology: support-structure diagnosis

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and diagnostic research design to assess the conditions under which an existing urban craft economy may support, compromise, or contradict post-growth-compatible trajectories. The research is exploratory, mapping the institutional, social, and spatial configurations that enable or constrain post-growth-oriented trajectories in a rapidly urbanising Global South context. Analytical depth and contextual understanding are prioritised over representativeness or quantification, in line with the study's focus on diagnosing structural conditions and power relations shaping craft-based economic futures.

The research approach is informed by the Real-Existing Degrowth (RED) framework, initially introduced by Kallis et al. (2022) and further developed by Gilbert et al. (2026) and Varvarousis et al. (Varvarousis et al., xxxx)). The RED framework was developed to counterbalance the predominance of future-oriented and normative scholarship in degrowth studies by systematising research on practices already present in real places that resist growth, adapt to its limits, or sustain forms of living well with lower dependence on expansion. Central to this approach is the recognition that such practices are often incomplete, hybrid, and internally contradictory, reflecting the difficulties of advancing degrowth-relevant trajectories within economies structurally oriented towards expansion and accumulation.

The RED approach places particular emphasis on the territorial dimension of transformation, drawing together insights from theories of spatial production (Lefebvre, 1991; Schmid, 2022) and commons-based resource governance (Ostrom, 2007; Agrawal, 2014). It proposes three analytical dimensions through which real-existing degrowth processes can be examined: material fabric, referring to infrastructures, technologies, material flows, and spatial forms through which social and economic life is organised; territorial regulation, encompassing formal and informal rules, policies, and governance arrangements; and social imaginaries, understood as the shared meanings, values, and representations through which societies interpret and legitimise economic life (Varvarousis, 2019). While these are articulated as core analytical dimensions, they remain dynamic and adaptable, allowing for context-specific operationalisation across diverse empirical settings.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the paper adopts a selective and context-sensitive operationalisation of the RED framework to diagnose the strengths, contradictions, and limits of Jaipur's craft economy in relation to post-growth transformation. The full RED framework is designed for systematic and comparative research into how degrowth-relevant territorial arrangements are produced and sustained across different places, including the assessment of outcomes, variables and causal attributes. This article pursues a more focused diagnostic task: to examine how the relationship between craft and post-growth is mediated in one large urban craft economy. For this reason, we operationalise RED by identifying support structures operating across material, territorial, and social dimensions at multiple scales. We define support structures as the institutional, material, financial, cultural, geographical, and historical conditions through which craft economies are sustained, transformed, or absorbed into dominant growth-oriented circuits. These include top-down institutional structures, such as state policies, regulatory frameworks, and international organisations; bottom-up and intermediary structures, encompassing craft communities, grassroots organisations, NGOs, designers, and entrepreneurial actors; and local conditions, referring to historically embedded spatial, cultural, and material characteristics of Jaipur that shape craft production and circulation. Rather than treating these structures as discrete or inherently enabling, we examine their ambivalent and intersecting roles in sustaining or constraining post-growth-oriented trajectories. In relation to RED, support structures provide the operational layer through which material fabric, territorial regulation and social imaginaries are examined in the Jaipur case. The specific configuration of these support structures was refined to reflect the Indian context, the craft sector's particularities, and the multiscalar nature of the inquiry.

To operationalise this research design, as shown in Fig. 1, the study draws on a combination of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with key craft-sector experts, on-site visits to craft fairs and markets, participant observation at a socio-ecological enterprise, and documentary analysis (Appendix, Tables 1 and 2). The interviews, each lasting over one hour, were conducted by the second author between December 2023 and August 2024 with five experts occupying different positions within the craft ecosystem, including craft activists, designers, retail consultants, and scholars. Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise and positionality within the craft ecosystem, rather than statistical representativeness. All participants were informed of the research scope and provided consent. Interviewees were pseudonymised during the analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and to generate interpretive insights into governance arrangements, market mediation, labour relations, and the policy dynamics shaping the sector. Informal conversations with artisans at craft fairs, particularly at Delhi Haat's Jaipur stalls, and observations during field visits were used to contextualise and validate expert perspectives, offering grounded insights into everyday production and market experiences.

In addition, the research involved close engagement with Dhun, a Jaipur-based organisation, through participant observation at workshops and exhibitions, and participation in a structured two-day programme on craft preservation and innovation, during which Jaipur Rugs was presented as an example of enterprise-led craft development. Dhun does not function as a standalone case study in the paper. Rather, this engagement served as a sensitising field encounter that informed the development of analytical categories and strengthened our contextual understanding of emerging craft-based development models involving women weavers, including initiatives linked to the Manchaha programme of Jaipur Rugs. Finally, policy documents, institutional reports and organisational materials were systematically reviewed to map actors, policies and programmes relevant to the top-down institutional and bottom-up/intermediary dimensions of the support-structure framework. These materials were identified through literature review, expert recommendations and targeted searches of government portals and affiliated websites, and are summarised in the tables and figures presented below. The empirical material was subsequently re-analysed through the support-structure diagnosis informed by the RED framework. The final interpretation emerged through iterative discussion among the authors, combining empirical and conceptual perspectives.

5. Mapping support structures: enablers, barriers and contradictions

We follow the support-structure framework and identify three interrelated support structures shaping Jaipur's craft economy: top-down, bottom-up and intermediary structures, and local conditions (Fig. 2). However, none of these structures operates in a mutually exclusive way, nor remains confined to a single scale, actor group, or support mechanism. Each component intersects, consolidates and diverges, unsettling a linear global–local or top-down model and creating a web of assemblages, yet without entirely dissolving the hierarchy of their interactions. We identify four dynamics here: encouragement, collaboration, friction and suppression, reflecting how these actors interact within Jaipur's craft ecosystem. These dynamics were derived inductively through thematic analysis of interviews, field observations

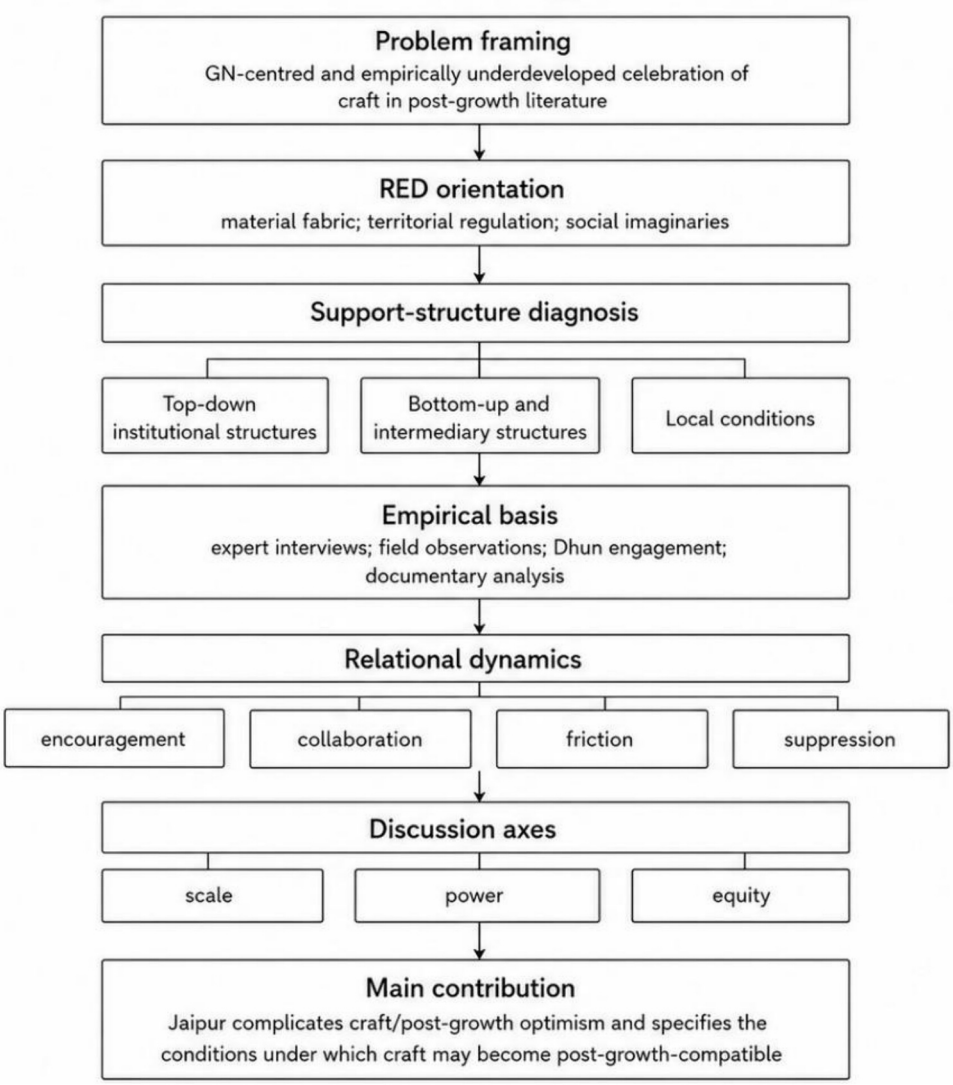


Fig. 1. Analytical architecture of the support-structure diagnosis. Source: authors.

and policy documents, and were then organised in relation to the three support structures identified above. Rather than discrete categories, these dynamics often overlap within the same institutional arrangements, making this craft ecosystem analysis a reflection of complex power geometries.

To keep the analysis concise, we do not discuss each component separately. Instead, we introduce key factors and focus on their post-growth possibilities and contradictions, drawing on expert interviews, field observations and policy documents. The possibilities discussed below cannot be applied uniformly to all crafts, nor are they inherently progressive. While some actors bolster the potential for a post-growth future rooted in craftspeople's welfare, artefact quality and localised sustainable value chains, others inhibit it by reproducing exploitative structures under the guise of innovation, growth, and modernisation.

5.1. Enabling dynamics: encouragement and collaboration

5.1.1. International organisations: symbolic and material revalorisation of crafts

As a World Craft City and UNESCO World Heritage City, Jaipur has received significant attention from global craft advocacy and cultural organisations. Table 2 captures international advocacy initiatives as top-down measures that enhance Jaipur's craft identity, cultural branding, and market visibility.

Among the enablers of transformation, international organisations hold a complex and controversial position. Their involvement contributes to the symbolic and material revalorisation of craft by inserting Jaipur into global networks of heritage, design, sustainability and cultural exchange. Initiatives such as the British Council's India-UK collaboration scheme 'Crafting Futures' show how international design thinking and cosmopolitan sustainability narratives, including circular design, are translated into locally embedded training programmes. Jaipur Rugs, one of the award recipients in 2022–23, demonstrates how partnerships and knowledge exchange operate. Our analysis shows that, with design expertise from the University of the Arts London's BA textile design students, women carpet weavers from a village in Jaipur were taught to develop modern designs and use digital tools to overcome pandemic-related challenges (British Council, 2023). Yet these initiatives are not neutral. Even when they adopt a grammar of exchange, co-creation, and ethical design, they can reproduce knowledge hierarchies between traditional craft knowledge and contemporary design/technical expertise (Martins, 2023; Mukhopadhyay, 2026). This is part of a recurring trend in which design experts interact with traditional craftspeople, under the banner of artisan empowerment and economic rescue. Still, it raises serious concerns about top-down knowledge transfer and the long-term autonomy of craftspeople. The influence of colonial art schools and modernist, cosmopolitan European designs in reviving Indian crafts is embedded within a longer trajectory of racial-

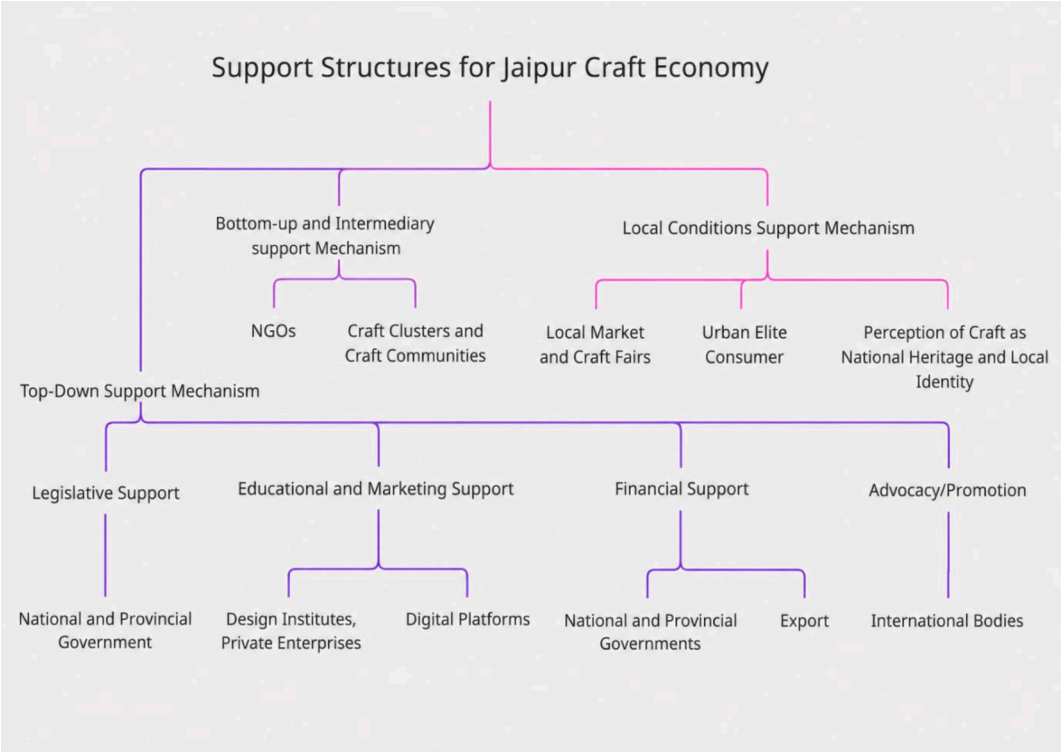


Fig. 2. Support structures shaping Jaipur's craft economy. Source: authors.

Table 2
International networks and influence on craft promotion. Source:https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/jaipur.

Networks	Key Initiatives	Intended Outcome
UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) UNESCO World Heritage City 'World Craft City'	Jaipur Municipality is implementing: Heritage walks along the old streets and markets, Global Art Square, Jaipur Haat, and the Crafts & Folk Art Gallery at Jaipur International Airport.	Boost direct sales online and on-site; tourism; cultural branding; international exchange; knowledge sharing.

Table 3
Major craft clusters in Jaipur.

Craft Cluster	Location	Specialisation	Scale/Community Structure
Bagru	Rural Jaipur	Hand block printing	200 small units
Nayla	Rural Jaipur	Gota patti or Zari embroidery	3500 artisans
Kot Jewar	Rural Jaipur	Blue pottery	200 families
Maniharon Ka Rasta	Walled city	Lac bangles	20,000 artisans and 500 traders
Sanganer	Urban Jaipur	Hand block printing	315 units with 3000 artisans
Kaagazi Mohalla	Urban Jaipur	Handmade paper	10,000 artisans
Kathputli Colony	Urban Jaipur	Puppetry	5000 artisans

Source: compiled by authors from District Industries Centre Jaipur (2017)Jaipur Development Authority, 2011

cultural hierarchy, pitting native craftspeople's physical labour against the creative, intellectual value of elite design schools (Dewan, 2004; Head, 1988). Moreover, the benefits are unevenly distributed, with export-oriented crafts and enterprises like Jaipur Rugs receiving sustained patronage from international agencies. In contrast, smaller and less marketable crafts continue to struggle. International actors, therefore, selectively encourage the symbolic and material revalorisation of craft, even when collaboration is framed as equitable.

5.1.2. Localised Craft Clusters: sustainable and inclusive production

Craft-practising communities often live in proximity, forming artisanal clusters of geographically concentrated households producing similar handicraft or handloom products or ancillary goods that support a single production chain. These clusters often comprise traditional communities that produce long-established products across generations (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2007). In Jaipur, we observe both rural and urban craft clusters specialising in various crafts. Table 3 offers an overview of some of the most significant clusters:

Craftspeople are the most instrumental part of this support structure, bringing a 'never-ending knowledge relationship' that transforms an otherwise unassuming technical object into an epistemic object (Rennstam and Paulsson, 2024, p. 4). Through them, the object becomes part of a wider craft community, geographically networked yet tied by kinship-caste structures. Within Jaipur's craft community, cross-religious (Tokas et al., 2022) and inter-caste cooperation has also been observed in hand block printing and woodcarving (Gaatha, 2022).

This proximity, we argue, allows for collaboration among artisans, lowers production costs, and facilitates the transmission of knowledge and techniques across generations. Local clusters also encourage resilience, enabling small-scale production tailored to cultural and market demands. In this sense, clustered craft production resonates with post-growth concerns for localised economies, intergenerational knowledge, repairable skills, social embeddedness and place-based production. While they form the backbone of many low-throughput and locally embedded production practices, their transformative capacity is severely constrained by structural barriers, including limited access to

financial resources, market linkages, and institutional support, as our interviewees confirmed. This lack of autonomy curtails their ability to thrive independently, making them vulnerable to the agendas of more powerful intermediaries such as designers, NGOs, and private enterprises. Even so, the grounded collaboration across independent production clusters in a craft production line is worth highlighting here.

5.1.3. Craft-led online social enterprises and brands

The rapid technological shift in the craft ecosystem (Table 4) acts as a hybrid enabling force combining top-down platform infrastructures with bottom-up and intermediary forms of market access. The shift towards social media marketing coincided with both the COVID-19 lockdown and rapid digital infrastructure development (S. Singh, 2021). This is reflected in field interactions with artisans such as Ramnarayan Prajapat, who reported that Instagram marketing increased his orders. Through digital platforms, new designers and cultural entrepreneurs are capitalising on the 'aura of the analogue' to capture urban markets (Luckman, 2013).

The rise of ethical, craft-led social enterprises partnering with craftspeople through online platforms signals a promising direction for post-growth-oriented collaboration. These actors often integrate principles of environmental sustainability and social equity into their business models. We draw attention to the 'business of handmade' (2025) project and associated ecosystem enablers, such as organisations like '200 Million Artisans', making a conscious shift in the language of 'Handmade and Craft-led Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)' or HCMs. These developments illustrate emerging collaboration between artisans and digital entrepreneurs. They encourage greater decentralisation and direct market access, although both remain mediated by digital platforms and literacy. This initiative also adds symbolic value by elevating perceptions of craft-led ethical brands. These social enterprises are not necessarily against market expansion, but their ethos is more post-growth compliant, aiming to secure livelihoods and distribute value across the production chain rather than making accumulation their primary growth imperative. However, it also positions craft producers as in need of rescue by HCMs, where partnership terms are not always equal or transparent. The perception that digital entrepreneurs are innovators and adaptive to market needs counters the fact that the craft sector itself is a sociotechnical ecosystem (Mamidipudi, 2019). This emergent space holds transformative potential but requires critical scrutiny and continuous monitoring.

5.2. Transformation barriers: suppression and friction

5.2.1. National and provincial government: export reliance, siloed policies and industrialising the handmade sector

Craft is defined as a state matter under the Indian Constitution. For ease of understanding, we refer to the state government as the provincial government in the paper. The development and promotion of crafts are primarily the responsibility of the provincial governments, with support from the national government. As a result, numerous bodies work in the handicraft and handloom sector at the city, provincial, and national levels. We aim to map this crisscrossing web of institutions based on our analysis of policy documents, institutional reports, and expert interviews (Appendix Table 2), alongside their implications for the craft economy (Fig. 3).

Table 4
Digital platforms facilitating direct access to market with varied ethical partnership models.

Platform	Function in Craft Ecosystem
Social Media	Direct marketing, visibility, bypassing intermediaries connecting artisans and artisan-focused businesses to urban consumers. Ramnarayan Prajapat, a blue pottery artist from Kot Jewar, affirmed this claim during our fieldwork at Delhi Haat (personal communication, January 3, 2024).
E-commerce marketplace	Small enterprises selling nationwide through Etsy, Amazon Karigar, Okhai, iTokri
WhatsApp Commerce	Low-cost storefront, direct orders for micro-enterprises

Source: compiled by authors

Table 5
Rajasthan's craft export contributing significantly to the economy. Source: Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, 2024; Government of Rajasthan, Tourism Department, n.d..

Indicator	Details
Current Export value (2024)	US$ 949 million
Projected Export Value (2030)	US$ 2,140 million
Foreign tourist arrivals in Rajasthan (2023)	approximately 1.7 million
Top exported crafts	Jewellery, Textiles, Miniature paintings

Rajasthan-specific policies propose several forms of support: financial assistance and social security (covering 100% of the interest on loans up to INR 300,000, insurance for self-help groups, scholarships for artisans' children); market-infrastructural development (national-level handicrafts exhibition week, state-level awards, Handicraft Design Centre, Handicraft Park); domestic marketing promotion (permanent marketing centres, branding, e-marketing, purchasing artisanal products up to 1 million) and export opportunities for artisans. Rajasthan's craft economy is export-oriented, as shown in Table 5. Handicrafts are among the state's top five exported products.

The top-down role of government policies reveals a distinct power geometry marked by developmentalist and growth-centric imperatives. The push to scale up production and make craft more exportable often increases competition and partially mechanises production, resulting in unemployment in the handmade sector. The heavy reliance on exports also reduces craftspeople's employment opportunities during economic slumps in the EU and the US (Tripathy, 2023). Rajasthan has a history of a powerful mercantile class advancing trade networks regionally and globally since the eighteenth century, thereby strengthening the sector (Hussain, 2008; Malhan & Saksena, 2019). This history complicates any simple opposition between craft and trade. Yet, from a post-growth perspective, the sector's export orientation raises difficult questions about ecological footprints, long-distance value chains, and artisans' capacity to adapt to changes in global demand. We return to this issue in the conclusion.

This multifaceted craft-policy landscape creates friction, as our expert interviewees highlight. They acknowledge the government's good intentions or those of selected bureaucrats. Yet, government policy is described as a 'confusing/haphazard space' where 'too many departments' are 'trying to do too many things', 'offering schemes that are short-term and don't eventually boil down to anything of benefit to the craftspeople' (Sangeeta, Interview). Sudha explained:

> So you have to combine different ministries, different government departments, tourism, culture, craft, handloom, small industry; all have to work together…But today…no matter [that] the prime minister keeps saying we shouldn't work in silos, the habit is still for each bureaucrat and each minister to keep their own kingdoms to themselves. You don't want to interact too much with each other, share files, [or] take collective decisions. I mean, they may have some collective meetings, but then you need a strong boss controlling the meeting to say, look, you better all do. Usually, each ministry wants to compete and outshine the other.

Both interviewees critiqued the grandiose nature of some initiatives, arguing that they fail to recognise that this sector is run by people, not machines (Parul, Interview). They argued for small, flexible funding dedicated to particular sectors and their needs (Sudha, Interview) and

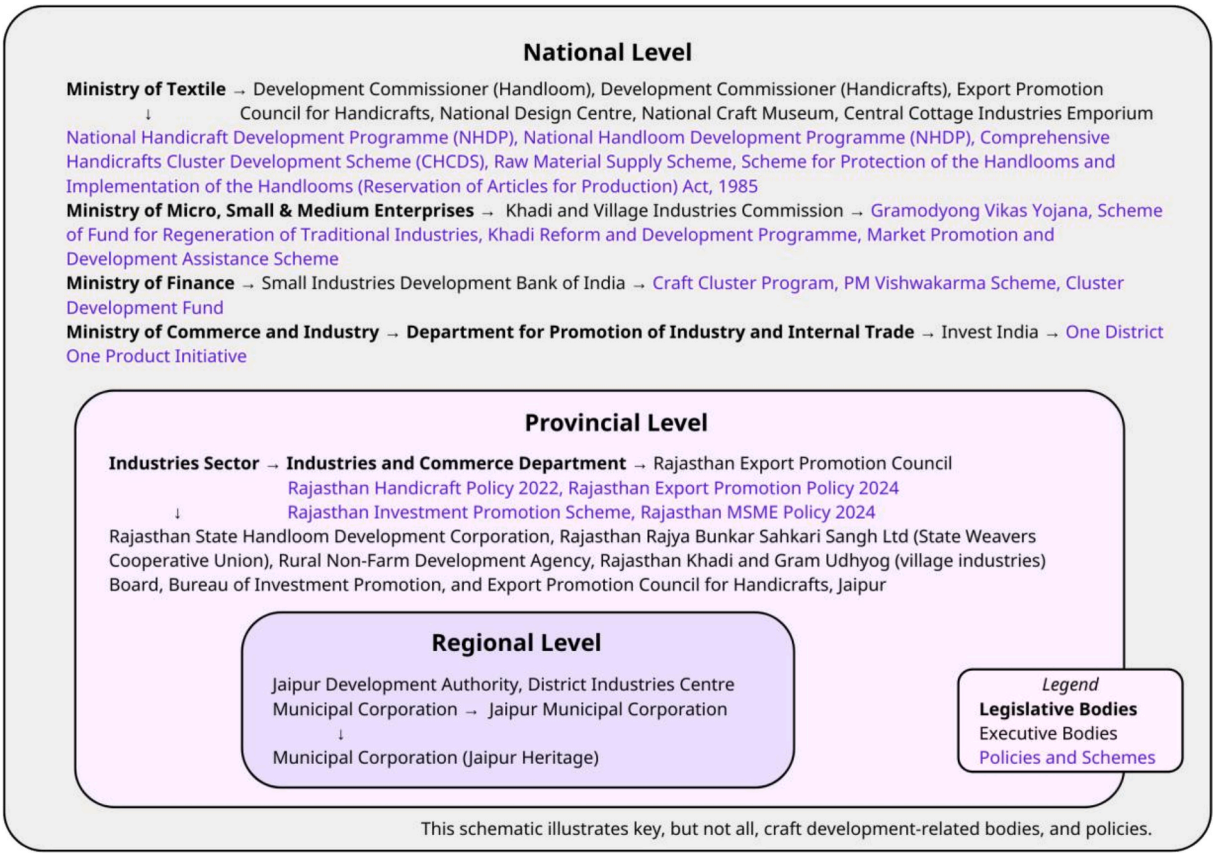


Fig. 3. Three-tier governance and policy interface shaping Jaipur's craft sector. Source: Authors' compilation from documents analysed in Appendix Table 2.

for equal opportunity for both textile and non-textile crafts (Sangeeta, Interview).

The efficacy of ODOP has also been questioned, as an interviewee said,

> Scheme One District, One Product, I think that's no point. This was something started in Thailand, small country, small district, small things and why we want to do it here. One district has a hell of a lot of craft. Yeah. You want to highlight one thing, do (that) but don't make it some kind of grandiose national program. Very exclusive. Yeah. You can ask each district to provide information about their craft and see who it is that you want to promote and highlight it, but don't make it a catch-all thing. (Sudha, Interview)

This quote again shows a lack of context-specific, artisan-oriented thinking. Crafts without visible export value or potential may fall through the cracks, while already struggling crafts are likely to suffer within a competitive ODOP market environment (Sangeeta, interview). The government also faces pressure from powerful industrial actors, as powerloom lobbyists heavily protested the Handloom Reservation Act, further undermining the efficacy of state interventions (Shrivastava, 2018).

Drawing on Anant (interview), we argue that a key hindrance to realising craft's potential is the government's inability to recognise that a growth-oriented industrial model based on scale and speed is not suitable for India's decentralised, home-based craft production, where more than 50% of the workforce consists of women. Here, craftspeople's pace of work should be valued as a marker of quality rather than volume. Decentralised work patterns should be appreciated as a model of local-area development, with artisans' wellbeing, aspirations, and quality of life at the centre of the policy discourse. Instead of promoting sufficiency, state policies pursue competitiveness and optimised output, often at the expense of craftspeople's livelihoods and wellbeing. Informality, rather than being seen as an asset promoting resilience and flexibility, is treated as a liability, prompting measures to formalise without understanding or supporting the social and economic logic of these systems. This creates friction, where overlapping policies and competing institutional agendas produce contradictory outcomes for the sector.

5.2.2. Designer-led corporate franchise: scalability, mediation and artisan autonomy

The design ecosystem in Jaipur bridges traditional craft skills with contemporary market trends. Institutes such as the Kumarappa National Handmade Paper Institute, the Rajasthan School of Arts, the 150-year-old Maharaja School of Arts and Crafts, and India's first Institute of Crafts and Design encourage an entrepreneurial environment.

Designer-led private enterprises, once seen as allies to artisans, are increasingly emulating corporate models of scalability and extraction-dependent growth. The entry of corporate franchises into the artisanal sector compounds this problem by commodifying craft through mass-produced, low-quality replicas, thereby eroding both the material and symbolic value of authentic handmade goods.

To dig deeper into the operational model of some of these successful craft brands, we follow our expert interviewee, Parul. According to her, Fabindia and Anokhi, the former originating in Delhi and the latter in Jaipur, were founded in 1960 and 1970, respectively but have taken very different paths since then, responding to the pressure of scalability. Capitalising on increasing demand, Fabindia expanded rapidly in domestic and international markets and now relies more on machine-produced than handcrafted goods to keep up with its massively expanded 300-store retail network. Parul said,

> For a benchmark, I would say it's Anokhi; they remained true to the craft. They started as a handicraft brand and stayed true to it. Extremely intelligent design interventions. Anokhi has 20 stores,

only 1 in Jaipur. 90% of Anokhi sales are from India…Fabindia model is different. Anokhi employs artisans; Fabindia contracts them, doesn't employ them.

Sangeeta, another expert interviewee, questions the lack of policy safeguards, as the craftspeople are prone to exploitation by emerging corporate fashion brands who restrict their creative and economic freedom. She revealed: 'Like the Aditya, the Birlas and the Reliances are going into the villages and making these chaps sign contracts for five years to work exclusively with them…that's not how craft works. There was freedom in craft.' The recent collaboration between leading fashion designer Sabyasachi and H&M to digitise Sanganeri block prints drew similar criticism from several craft organisations (Jaitly, 2021). Fundamentally, these instances highlight the chasm between artisanal work and designer corporate enterprises in the global hierarchy of value, which denies craftspeople the opportunity to be innovators (Herzfeld, 2004). Such practices operate as forms of suppression, where capitalist imperatives of scale, efficiency, and exploitative contracts marginalise artisan autonomy and reshape the value of craft.

Jaipur Rugs, albeit catering to a luxury consumer base, offers a positive case, as we observed during our field visit to Dhun. It uses a model in which women artisans receive designs and inputs at their doors and the company collects finished products from their homes. It also helps artisans benefit from state policies, set up weaving looms in their homes at subsidised rates, and provides training, giving them long-term employment security (Kumari et al., 2025). Rangasutra has a grassroots ownership model in which some 2,000 women artisans from villages across Rajasthan and Gujarat share ownership, thereby encouraging a redistributive model of the post-growth economy. Nevertheless, more grounded ethnographic research is needed in this space to scrutinise these claimed practices against concerns of fair compensation, cultural appropriation and intellectual property rights. The contrast suggests that the scale of the crafts is not inherently incompatible with post-growth principles; rather, how this expansion recognises artisan ownership, protects the slow speed of handmade production, gives employment security to artisans and distributes profits determines the brand's post-growth compatibility.

5.2.3. *Third-sector organisations*

NGOs arguably play an important role in artisans' social welfare, advocating for their rights, connecting them to government schemes, and pushing for policy change. Their role in strengthening women's skills, economic autonomy and sustainable production chains is noticeable (Nandan & Kushwaha, 2022; Čajka & Novotny, 2025). Several key NGOs work nationally while maintaining close ties with Jaipur's artisans and craft-based organisations. Some legacy enterprises indeed create conditions that encourage post-growth futures. Their interventions in Jaipur's craft sector are compiled in Table 6.

Even though third-sector organisations in the Global South are instrumental in transitioning towards a post-extractivist economy, as seen in the Peruvian and Chilean cases (Hollender, 2018), our expert respondents have levelled a critique of NGOs' role. As Sangeeta noted:

Table 6
Craft NGOs and their modes of engagement. Source: compiled by authors.

NGOs	Primary role
Dronah Foundation	Policy support and heritage advocacy (such as the World Craft City title), working with the Rajasthan State Government.
Dastkar and Dastkari Haat Samiti	Urban market access, promotion and organisation of large fairs
All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association	Policy advocacy, skill training, research (e.g., Jaipur Block)
Craft Revival Trust	Documentation, advocacy

Nobody does any kind of follow −up assessment or anything of that sort. And the agencies that also get all these projects are just doing it because the agency is making money out of it. That's it. Okay, so then that's the next level where we have the agencies, the NGOs, the CSR initiatives now, et cetera, who, to a very large extent, are not really… taking into account again, the need of the craftspeople more. It is about first fulfilling their need and their own survival, which you cannot blame. If you set up an organisation, you have 10 people, 12 people, 25 people; you've got to feed them first before you start feeding the artisans. So the artisans, typically are just almost like a pawn or the USP for an organisation to say that we are working for their upliftment, but you're actually first working for your own upliftment.

Despite their stated objectives, Some NGOs, as described by our interviewee, operate within a logic of self-preservation. Sangeeta added that NGOs are often hamstrung by funding agencies' reformist agendas and caught between immediate results and the potential for long-term, radical alternative change. Accountability to donors and branding imperatives often overshadow their commitment to long-term capacity-building among artisans. Short-term projects, branding exercises, extractive methods, and fragmented interventions dominate the landscape, offering little sustainable transformation or systemic support. These limitations reflect a dynamic of friction and, at times, suppression, where donor-driven priorities and NGOs' own survival constrain long-term transformative change. NGOs' role has therefore remained controversial in development discourse (Mitlin et al., 2007). In terms of helping the craft sector transition toward a post-growth economy, the question remains whether NGOs, including civil society, can lead transformative projects of gender equity, social justice, and economic redistribution without deeper political intent or meaningful policy shifts from the state.

Rather than presenting Jaipur as a post-growth model, we examine how growth-oriented and post-growth logics coexist and interact within the support structures. The Indian craft sector thus embodies a deeply contested terrain, where multiple actors interact through a shifting power geometry. The sector's transformative capacity depends not only on the presence of supportive actors but on how power is distributed and exercised across networks of influence, creating friction and suppression. A post-growth future for the Indian craft economy will depend on reconfiguring these power relations: prioritising craftspeople's agency, valuing informality and decentralisation as strengths, recognising their innovative capacity, and ensuring that interventions are rooted in long-term, small-scale, justice-driven agendas (Mamidipudi, 2019).

6. From possibility to praxis: what Jaipur reveals about "crafting" post-growth futures

Post-growth literature on craft has treated craft-led creative economies as niche businesses focused on luxury artisanal products concentrated in affluent regions of the GN. Barring some exceptions, it has hitherto paid limited attention to existing large-scale craft economies, which are not emerging as 'alternatives' but have adapted from pre-capitalist production regimes to mixed economic systems in which postcapitalist and post-growth dynamics coexist with pressures to integrate into capital accumulation processes. Thus, the post-growth literature's assumption that craft-led economies can positively catalyse the transition to a post-growth future has remained largely a theoretical exercise, with little empirical backing.

To address this gap, our research systematically diagnoses Jaipur's craft ecosystem (one of the largest in the world) to investigate how it enables, constrains and complicates post-growth-compatible forms of territorial change. Using a focused, context-sensitive operationalisation of the RED research agenda, the article aimed to scrutinise the roles of various support structures and their potential to shape post-growth-oriented possibilities, focusing on specific enabling and hindering

dynamics. By focusing on the Global South and one of the fastest-growing urban territories of India's continuously expanding economy, the article complements and problematises previous efforts focused solely on Mediterranean and other small-scale Global North areas, while also problematising the often uncritical celebration of crafts as a post-capitalist or post-growth transition instrument. Thus, the analysis does not identify a linear transition toward post-growth but a contested terrain in which contradictory economic logics operate simultaneously. It does so by paying attention to three critical areas: scale, power, and equity. Finally, it goes beyond criticism to foreground possibilities and emerging spaces of hope that can be mobilised to support an equitable expansion of livelihood opportunities in Jaipur's craft sector without making economic growth an end in itself. Such an approach strengthens economic activities that redistribute value, secure meaningful livelihoods and enhance artisan autonomy while remaining attentive to ecological limits. This vision aligns with GS voices in the post-growth debate, which call for expanding cooperative, community-based, and socially reproductive activities while contracting resource-intensive and extractive forms of material accumulation beyond national boundaries, predominantly targeting middle and upper classes in both GN and GS (Gerber & Raina, 2018).

A. **Scale and heterogeneity:** Craft economies such as Jaipur's operate at a massive scale, through horizontal, decentralised production and distribution networks. From policymakers, artisan-producers and designers, to intermediaries, exporters, traders, and consumers, this craft system is a heterodox assemblage of materials, actors, capital, machinery, and technologies, often stretched beyond the scale of the Jaipur region or the Indian nation-state. Such economies do not neatly fit into post-growth or capitalist categories. The hybridity and heterogeneity of this system challenge the dualities of informal-formal, traditional-entrepreneurial and local–global dynamics and create a third space of economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2020). This situated complexity of craft economies in the Global South metropolis warrants rethinking the principles of post-growth itself. For instance, the emphasis on 'relocalisation' can often sit at odds with the 'developmental nationalism' agenda of the state, which intends to boost the livelihood potential of the impoverished craft sector economically (Smith, 2023; Rees, 2015). Whilst we do not advocate for statist development interventions, which more often result in displacement, land grabs, and ecosystem destruction, development that enhances social recognition and economic dignity remains necessary for the sector's survival. We therefore situate our argument within the post-development discourse of community-led and third-sector-enabled initiatives from below (Dhar & Chakrabarti, 2019). Furthermore, Jaipur has a long history of international trade in artisanal products dating to the pre-colonial period, which was further strengthened by imperial trade routes. Without a strong domestic market for high-value artisanal products, one cannot rely solely on a relocalisation agenda. Such an assumption would also sit uneasily with the idea that places are relationally constructed and processually made and unmade (Massey, 1993). Whereas Jaipur's place identity influences its craft heritage, materials, design, and aesthetics, the city itself is a networked and emerging category produced through global colonial and cosmopolitan encounters that have helped scale up its craft production without losing the regional distinctiveness of its crafts. We also caution against treating post-growth transitions as bounded by national territories. As decolonial critiques note, livelihoods in GS are tied to asymmetrical international trade and market dependencies (Lang, 2024). Without a North-South alliance and institutional restructuring, reduced GN consumption alone may not create conditions for transformation in GS countries. Finally, we are wary of valorising the local where multiple axes of exploitation based on caste, gender and class persist. Jaipur's craft space, produced through the nexus of local–global, and formal-informal economies and decentralised, labour-intensive rural–urban clusters, therefore warrants recognition within the post-growth transition debates.

B. **Power geometries and dual role of support structures:** The three layers of support structures do not operate in isolation or in predictable ways, but intersect in ways that produce encouragement, collaboration, suppression, as well as friction, for post-growth futures. Some actors within this structure keep the ethos of sustainability and equity at heart, while others reinforce exploitative growth models. More importantly, the same institutional arrangement may combine enabling and constraining effects, depending on how authority, resources, recognition and market access are distributed. We derive these four dynamics inductively from the ecosystem analysis presented above. To unpack these actors' power geometries in line with post-growth principles, we elaborate on these four dynamics. *Encouragement* emerges through inclusive initiatives that align with decentralised production, recognise the socio-technological contribution of artisans' embedded knowledge, and foster a redistributive ownership structure, as seen in some international efforts, enterprises, and third-sector organisations. *Collaboration* is also visible in the co-production of value by designers, artisans, and some social enterprises, even though these remain uneven and often fragile. *Suppression* occurs when corporate brands, donor-driven NGOs, and export lobbies impose extractive practices geared toward rapid turnaround, high-volume production, and market efficiency, constraining artisan autonomy and compromising artisanal labourers' wellbeing. Finally, *friction* arises when overlapping mandates and competing agendas among state bodies, NGOs and market actors create multiple policies with counterintuitive results. These findings challenge common assumptions about the simplified traits associated with the three-tier support structures: inhibiting top-down governance, grassroots enabling actors, and emancipatory local conditions. They identify spaces of possibility for backcasting and goal-setting emerging at the intersection of encouraging and collaborative efforts towards a post-growth future.

C. **Artisan equity and wellbeing**: While craft producers are the backbone of the sector, their autonomy is constrained by top-down policy interventions, designer-led enterprises, and market competition. Although digital platforms have enabled the rise of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that taps into the demands of conscious consumers investing in high-value, long-lasting products, this space still lacks meaningful artisan co-ownership and partnerships. In the post-growth debate, Jaipur's craft sector offers an opportunity to learn from a decentralised, networked, gender-inclusive, climate-resilient, innovative and creative sector. Yet the cracks of precarious employment and low quality of life seriously question its alignment with the post-growth debate, which argues for workers' socio-economic wellbeing. Artisan wellbeing therefore becomes the central criterion for assessing the post-growth potential of craft economies, rather than an assumed outcome of craft production.

This paper is therefore a call for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and designers entering the handmade business to align their economic models with post-growth principles appropriate to GS contexts. It specifies conditions for a post-growth vision for Jaipur's and, by extension, India's craft sector, one that is environmentally less resource-extractive; economically a critical source of livelihood for women and traditionally marginalised castes; socially bridges the production-consumption gap between rural and urban areas; and culturally sustains the aesthetic identities of communities and places. Theoretically, the scale, heterogeneity of informalisation and decentralisation, and multiple axes of power within Jaipur's craft ecosystem open up productive challenges for post-growth scholarship. It urges consideration of the political mechanisms and leverage needed to support a territorial transition towards a post-growth future in a metropolis rooted in its heritage craft economy. The challenge, then, is not to celebrate craft as already post-growth, but to reorganise the conditions under which craft

can sustain livelihoods, autonomy and ecological limits without being subordinated to speed, volume and extractive growth.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Rishika Mukhopadhyay: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Visualization, Validation, Project administration. **Kanika Prajapat:** Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Resources. **Angelos Varvarousis:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Visualization, Validation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgement

Varvarousis acknowledges support by the European Research Council: REAL — ERC-2022-SYG REAL Reference Number 101071647 and support by the **Grant RYC2021-034401-I** funded by **MICIUAEI10.13039501100011033** and by **European Union NextGenerationEUPRTR**.

Preparation of this manuscript was supported by R. Mukhopadhyay attending the University of Southampton Faculty of Medicine/Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences Writing Retreat (July 2026).

Appendix A

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Table 1
Overview of Interviews and Field Activities.

Type of Activity	Date(s)	Description	Participants / Sources (names pseudonymised)
Semi-structured Interviews	Dec 2023 – Aug 2024	Interviews with key Indian craft experts identified via literature review and snowballing	Anant (Ecological Economist, December 8, 2023); Sudha (Craft Activist, Delhi Haat, Dastkari Haat Samiti, December 26, 2023); Sangeeta (Textile/Fashion Designer, January 17, 2024); Annapurna (Cotton Textile Expert, Andhra crafts, January 19, 2024); Parul (Retail Consultant, Jaipur, August 31, 2024)
Craft Fair Visit	January 5 2024	Informal conversations with artisans at Delhi Haat, facilitated by Sudha	25 Jaipur-based artisans (contact details collected for future research)

Table 2
Sources and Documents for Support Structures Scheme.

Source Type	Organisation / Website	Description	Link
Government Policy Documents	Various (10 documents)	Analysed against post-growth principles: quality, labour intensity, localised production	https://rising.rajasthan.gov.in/handlooms-and-handicrafts https://www.nsws.gov.in/s3fs/2022–12/rajasthan-handicraft-policy-2022.pdf http://www.jaipurmc.org/PDF/Auction_MM_RTI_Act_Etc_PDF/04-Chapter-4.pdf
Website	Rajasthan Tourism Department	Secondary data on craft-related tourism initiatives	https://tourism.rajasthan.gov.in
Website	Department of Art and Culture, Rajasthan	Information on cultural policies and artisan support	https://artandculture.rajasthan.gov.in
Website	Rural Non-Farm Development Agency	Data on rural craft-based livelihoods	https://www.rnfd.rajasthan.gov.in
Website	Rajasthan Handloom Development Corporation	Information on handloom schemes and artisan support	https://www.rhdc.rajasthan.gov.in

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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