

Market expansion for Lalejin’s artisans to sustain pottery production



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The name of pottery in Iran is closely associated with Lalejin in Hamadan, a place where hundreds of small and large workshops are dedicated to producing a wide array of traditional and decorative ceramics. Although pottery serves as the main livelihood for the people of this city and region, various challenges and issues threaten the vitality and sustainability of this art-industry.

Despite its international reputation, many potters in Lalejin still depend heavily on traditional sales methods, with minimal presence in digital platforms and international markets. The lack of robust branding, effective marketing strategies, and proper packaging also serve as significant obstacles to increasing sales and expanding their market reach, IRNA wrote.

Many young residents of Lalejin, known globally as the city of pottery, are currently hesitant or unwilling to pursue ceramics professionally due to the low income it provides. Moreover, the scarcity of modern training programs and the underutilization of new technologies prevent this industry from evolving to meet the changing demands of the market. This gap leaves artisans unaware of contemporary techniques and innovative designs, with some stuck in old, repetitive patterns that have lost appeal in modern markets, thus limiting their competitiveness.

The disinterest among youth is compounded by the industry’s limitations, including insufficient access to advanced training and the lack of adoption of modern technological solutions. Artisans often work in limited, non-standardized, and suboptimal en-

vironments, which negatively impact both the quality and quantity of their output. Transportation issues and inadequate export facilities further constrain access to international markets, limiting growth opportunities for Hamadan’s handicrafts.

Although some supportive programs are in place, many artisans believe that these efforts are insufficient, often arriving too late to make a significant impact. Additionally, widespread issues such as lack of insurance and job security threaten the livelihoods of many workers in this sector, creating uncertainty about their future employment and stability. Changing lifestyles and consumer preferences have led to reduced demand for handicraft products, which diminishes artists’ motivation and discourages new generations from entering the field. Consequently, some artists choose to migrate to larger cities in search of better opportunities, resulting in a decline in skilled workers and a weakening of the local craftsmanship heritage.

Resource and economic challenges

Mehdi Keshvari Delavar, head of the Lalejin’s Union of Pottery and Ceramics, pointed out that one of the main challenges is the failure to provide potters with clay, despite its abundant availability around Lalejin. He explained that although efforts have been made, the process of obtaining permits to extract clay remains unresolved in some provincial offices, such as the Agricultural Jihad Department.

He emphasized that this ongoing problem poses a serious threat to the pottery industry and employment in the region. “Last year, high-quality clay did not reach

the artisans, which resulted in the loss of labor and the closure of many workshops. We hoped this issue would be resolved before the end of the year, but we are still waiting for the quarry’s permit to be granted.” Keshvari Delavar also highlighted that the rising costs of raw materials for ceramics, glazes, and packaging supplies have contributed to the stagnation and overall decline of the pottery market, despite the unfavorable market conditions. He described these economic pressures as further impeding growth and innovation in this traditional craft.

He continued: “Last year, we experienced three stages of price hikes for pottery and ceramic goods. However, producers’ prices did not keep pace with the stagnant market and unhealthy competition. In some cases, products were even offered below their cost price, which could, in the long run, lead to the closure of some workshops.” He also stated: “Nearly 140 workshops in Lalejin face gas supply issues and still rely on white petroleum as they have in the past. This situation reduces product quality and creates significant problems for artisans. We urgently need decisive action from gas authorities and support in this regard.”

Zainab Kheirandish, an artist specializing in enamel work on ceramics, highlighted that the main concern for pottery artists in Hamadan is selling their products. She said, “The issue of exporting handicrafts requires the formation of a specialized working group, along with effective marketing and advertising efforts, all supported by the government.”

She added that most of the province’s artisans produce work that

has a reputation on a global level and emphasized: “For selling artists’ products, including ceramics, a team of marketing experts and artists must be formed with government backing to ensure that the profits from sales go directly to the artisans and not middlemen or brokers.”

Absence of permanent market

Kheirandish also questioned why there shouldn’t be a permanent domestic market for handicraft sales. She explained: “All cities claiming to have a thriving handicraft scene have craft markets, and these markets should be located in the most visited and accessible places for travelers — not in sequestered areas.”

She continued: “Renting a stall in seasonal markets involves high costs that many artists cannot afford, and the quality of products offered can be inconsistent. If a dedicated market for handicrafts were established, where products are showcased from production directly to sale, targeted buyers would visit and make purchases solely of handicrafts.”

She reiterated the need for a team of marketing experts and artists supported by the government to help sell products like ceramics, ensuring that the profits benefit the artisans directly instead of intermediaries.

Kheirandish further stated: “The best locations for seasonal exhibitions are often assigned to the private sector without substantial government support. Moreover, artists do not receive free accommodation or meals, making participation in such exhibitions in other cities financially unfeasible.”

She added that the number of exhibitions has been decreasing

each year because cities tend to prioritize participation in the Tehran exhibition, while provincial offices and municipalities do not allocate sufficient funds or support for local events.

She also mentioned that Hamadan has immense potential in indigenous arts and a wealth of talented artists, but the services provided are insufficient and do not reflect the stature of these artists within the province.

Kheirandish pointed out that artists are facing rising costs of raw materials daily. Because there is only one center within Hamadan that supplies these materials — selling at any price they wish — artisans often have to purchase from outside the province at higher prices.

Additionally, artist insurance remains a major concern, as only a small fraction of artisans are insured. Without basic support and job security, many artists lack the motivation to continue their crafts.

She also noted that in Hamadan, there are suitable venues for holding exhibitions related to heritage and municipal arts, but these spaces are largely idle or underutilized. Since there are no active craft houses in the city, he questioned why these venues are not being used to their full potential to support local artists.

Supporting artisans

Furthermore, many artisans in the region have closed their workshops due to rising rental and leasing costs. He emphasized that, with minimal space, they can still develop their craft, and if these vacant spaces are made accessible to artisans, productivity and efficiency could significantly improve.

A significant challenge is the lack of a comprehensive database

and accurate archive for the artists of the province. He stressed that data on the number of artists, entrepreneurs (broken down by gender), workshop capacities, and the issues faced by artisans should be compiled into a central database to aid strategic planning. Unfortunately, no reliable statistics exist on the closure of craft workshops last year due to financial difficulties.

said: “If we consider tourism as the foundation, then the handicrafts — the columns, windows, walls, and roof of this building — are what attract travelers and tourists. Handicrafts hold immense potential for export and currency generation; however, they are often neglected, and the stakeholders in this field are marginalized.”

The artist emphasized, “We need dedicated budgets for training and upgrading artisans, such as courses in artificial intelligence. Our artists possess creative minds and skilled hands, but we cannot afford to fall behind in technology and global advancements. They must be given proper training.”

She also pointed out that some indigenous arts in the province could be better promoted with strong media efforts. She lamented the neglect in promoting master artisans and pioneers of the province’s art scene and criticized the weak media presence in the field of handicrafts.

Finally, she suggested: “A festival could be organized for indigenous arts, and artworks from across the country — such as in enameling (minakari) — could be sent to Hamadan for evaluation. We need to actively promote these local crafts and ensure that the traditional, authentic crafts of the province are preserved and remembered.”



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