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# Understanding Changing Artisanal Occupational Milieus and Identities

Conceptualising the Study of Artisans

Angelique Wildschut and Xolani Ngazimbi

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LABOUR MARKET  
INTELLIGENCE PARTNERSHIP

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**Author:** Angelique Wildschut & Xolani Ngazimbi  
**Institution:** Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)  
**Email:** [awildschut@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:awildschut@hsrc.ac.za)  
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## Preface

One of the gravest economic challenges facing South Africa is high unemployment, but at the same time, a skills mismatch. The market demand for skilled labour is greater than the number of individuals completing post-school education and training. Prospective employers often complain that the education system does not give individuals the necessary skills to be productive in the workplace, or to start their own enterprises.

Government acknowledges that the unemployment crisis is a systematic problem and cannot be addressed by ad hoc interventions scattered across line departments. With this 'big picture' thinking in mind, DHET aims to create broad and equitable access to a full spectrum of post-school opportunities and lifelong learning encompassing adult education and training, workplace training, the FET college system, artisan and technical training, higher education and innovation.

DHET's ability to create these learning opportunities requires a network of partners to gather and maintain a labour market intelligence system. Such a system can provide analytical insights to support policies and intervention programmes.

In February 2012, therefore, DHET commissioned a HSRC led research consortium to support its capacity to create and maintain a labour market information and intelligence system, guided by the national Delivery Agreement 5. The primary focus is the development of a 'strategic intelligence capability' towards the establishment of 'a credible institutional mechanism for skills planning'. The HSRC coordinated research project is organised in terms of six interlocking research themes, two which focus on labour market information and four which focus on labour market intelligence:

- Theme 1. Establishing a foundation for labour market information systems in South Africa
- Theme 2. Skills forecasting: the supply and demand model (*a WITS EPU project*)
- Theme 3. Studies of selected priority sectors
- Theme 4. Reconfiguring the post-schooling sector
- Theme 5. Pathways through education and training and into the workplace
- Theme 6. Understanding changing artisanal occupational milieus and identities

The consortium made a strategic decision that their research must not duplicate or repeat existing research about the challenges facing South Africa's education and training system and labour markets. Their research must address gaps, promote synergies and explore complementarities.

Hence, as a first step, working papers were commissioned to inform the research agenda for each theme. Although the working papers cover different issues, each has four common dimensions: policy challenges to institutionalise and build a post-school education and training system in South Africa, lessons from seminal national and international research, conceptual frameworks, methodological issues and data challenges raised by this research, and potential research gaps.

One of the HSRC led consortium's goals is to create a living community of practice that researches and debates education, skills and labour market issues. These working papers were presented at a conference in May 2012 to start building such a research network.

The dissemination of these working papers is intended to encourage more individuals to join the research community. We look forward to individuals' comments. They can be emailed to [agoldstuck@hsrc.za.za](mailto:agoldstuck@hsrc.za.za). Welcome to the research community!

Theme 1:	Theme 3:	Theme 4:	Theme 5:	Theme 6:
<b>Establishing a foundation for labour market information system in South Africa</b>	<b>Studies of selected priority sectors</b>	<b>Reconfiguring the post-schooling sector</b>	<b>Pathways through education and training into the workplace</b>	<b>Understanding changing artisanal occupational milieus and identities</b>
<b>Simon McGrath</b> Some international reflections on developing VET indicators	<b>Haroon Bhorat and Morne Oosthuizen</b> Studies of Selected Priority Sectors in the South African Labour Market: A Proposed Research Programme	<b>Andre Kraak</b> Private post-school education in South Africa	<b>Michael Cosser</b> Pathways through education and training and into the labour market	<b>Angelique Wildschut</b> Conceptualising the study of artisans
<b>Phil Toner</b> Establishing a foundation for labour market information systems in South Africa	<b>Peter Jacobs and Tim Hart</b> A critical review of the research on skills development in rural areas	<b>Andre Kraak</b> Differentiation in the post-school sector	<b>Pundy Pillay</b> Pathways through education and training and into the workplace: a concept paper	<b>Jeanne Gamble</b> Models and pathways to institutionalise apprenticeships
<b>Anthony Gewer</b> Developing a framework for institutional planning and monitoring in FET Colleges	<b>Shirin Motala</b> A critical review of research on skills development and labour market demand in the early childhood development sector	<b>Joy Papier et al</b> Contemporary issues in public FET colleges	<b>Sharlene Swartz</b> Navigational capacities for youth employment: A review of research, policies, frameworks and methodologies	
<b>Carmel Marock</b> Developing a framework for understanding SETA performance: Monitoring and evaluating their role in skills planning, steering and enabling a supply within their sector	<b>Thembinkosi Twalo</b> A comparative review of skills development in cooperatives	<b>Veronica McKay</b> A critical review on Adult Basic Education (ABET) in South Africa	<b>Fiona Lewis</b> Traffic jams or trees – how are South African youth progressing through the higher education sector? And what lessons can we learn from current studies?	
<b>Bongiwe Mncwango</b> Towards a demand side firm level survey of labour information in South Africa	<b>Margaret Chitiga and Stewart</b> Development of a national skills forecasting model	<b>Thenjiwe Meyiwa and Nolutho Diko</b> The state of graduate teacher transitions to the labour market	<b>Stephanie Alais</b> Jobs? What jobs? Skills? What skills? An overview of studies examining relationships between education and training and labour markets	

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<b>Michael Cosser and Fabian Arendse</b> Education and labour market indicators	<b>Imraan Valodia</b> Conceptualising skills development in the informal sector	<b>Felix Maringe</b> An overview of studies exploring systemic issues related to the South African post-school sector		
<b>Joan Roodt</b> National database sets and research on labour market demand		<b>Peliwe Lolwana</b> Is post-school education adult education and training? The shape and size of post-school education		
<b>Mariette Visser</b> National database sets available for post school sector (supply side)		<b>Michelle Buchler</b> A critical review of research on skills development qualifications structures		
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## SUMMARY

The scarcity of skilled professionals and artisans in many economic sectors is of great concern, with high levels of migration in a globalised labour market (Erasmus & Breier 2009). The social and political conditions, the milieu within which professionals are required to work, have shifted globally and in South Africa after apartheid. The current goal is to train professionals and artisans who have competitive skills and who are willing to work and stay in South Africa. A particular concern is the need to train and retain more black and women professionals and artisans, to shift the unequal hierarchical patterns of the past (Breier & Wildschut 2006). A related concern is the changing status and identity of artisanal occupations, to address skills shortages and shift past patterns of discriminatory access and success.

Many would argue that artisanal occupations are in crisis in our country. There are widespread claims around the shortage of artisans (SAMP, 2005, Mukora, 2009, Van Rooyen et al, 2010). The ability of our vocational education and training system to produce the required quantity and quality of artisans is under question (The Skills Portal, 2010, Le Roux, 2011, Kunene, 2010, De Swardt, 2011). The low status associated with artisanal skilling and employment continues to militate against interventions aimed at increasing the numbers of artisans for the labour market. While there have been concerted efforts to address such issues in South Africa, this paper argues that the ability to do so successfully, has suffered from a limited understanding of the context within which artisanal skills development and practice is taking place.

## INTRODUCTION

The expansion of intermediate artisan and technical skills is recognized as imperative for the growing economy (Mukora 2009). But, while mechanisms (like JIPSA<sup>1</sup> and ASGISA<sup>2</sup>), have been set up in support of these goals, artisan development in South Africa is plagued by the historical imprint of a system severely intertwined with racial and gendered prejudice. And so our country also has “to recognize and deal with the legacy of skills underdevelopment amongst the majority of South Africa’s citizens, caused by the systematic denial of opportunities to black South Africans to acquire skills under apartheid...” (Presidency 2010, 3). Equally important is the plight of the growing constituency of unemployed youth in our country - and artisanal training has long been recognized as a vehicle to address this problem. Artisanal skills development is thus recognized as a key priority for our government towards achieving greater economic development and historical redress, within the context of widespread and growing levels of youth unemployment.

While all agree that increased artisan development is important, there is substantial disagreement on the scale and nature of demand for these skills. In other words, we know it is important to foster and grow the systems of artisanal skills production (Kruss et al 2012), but we lack clarity on the

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) formed in March 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), launched in July 2005, designed to halve employment, halve poverty, accelerate employment equity and improve broad-based black economic empowerment (McGrath & Akoojee 2007).

nature of skills required. How many artisans exactly are needed<sup>3</sup>, in which areas, at what levels and in which configurations?

Our lack of clarity around the nature of demand is exacerbated by confusion around the nature of the supply of artisanal skills.<sup>4</sup> There appears to be confusion in relation to the routes to artisanal skilling<sup>5</sup>, the size of contribution by different routes, and poor understanding of the issues underlying quality and success in the production of qualified artisans.

Underpinning these issues are changes in the context within which work occurs in contemporary and increasingly globalized societies, which severely impacts on the extent, nature and location of demand and supply of artisanal skills. This has direct implications for what it means to be an artisan today. Artisans working, for example, as motor mechanics today require vastly different skills sets and levels of skilling, to perform their work on a daily basis. Surely this shifts the notion of what it means to be an artisan and what it is that would constitute artisanal knowledge, skills and competencies, in contradistinction to other forms?

While acknowledging the importance of establishing the scale of artisanal skills supply and demand, research in this area has alluded to the need to better understand the drivers of artisanal demand and supply. Mukora (2009) suggests research that explores employers' perceptions of the value of artisanal-skilling, the rhetoric around skills shortages and the confusion around the status of the apprenticeship and learnership systems.

The bottom line is that we need to be able to better evaluate skills in our country. But rather than being pre-occupied with estimations of artisanal skills shortages in the labour market, we need to focus more closely on understanding the drivers of the system of artisanal production. And then we need to move further, and consider the close interplay between these and the changing labour market in shaping each other. This paper proposes a framework for the study of artisanal occupations in South Africa that draws from such a perspective, in three steps.

The paper starts off by drawing from recent empirical research on artisanal skills production in South Africa that has highlighted key systemic blockages to increased artisan development. This is an important starting point, as the decline in artisanal skills output over the last decade needs to be better understood, before we try to attend to problematic issues in the labour market. Then, we move on to consider how the artisanal skills production system interacts with labour market forces to shape the nature of demand for artisanal skills. Here we highlight the importance of the impact of the national and international labour market together with the national and international artisanal occupational milieus. Lastly, synthesising and drawing on the issues emerging from the discussion in the preceding sections, we propose the Sociology of Work and Occupations/Professions as a useful theoretical lens and methodological framework to approach the study of artisans.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Master Scarce Skills List of 2006 reflected a shortage of more than 40 000 artisans in 2006/7, whereas Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) research put the estimate higher at 50 000. Thus the target was set to produce 50 000 individuals with priority artisanal skills by 2010. The 2007 and 2008 National Master Scarce Skills list reflected a further increase in demand to more than 60 000 artisans in engineering and construction related skills.

<sup>4</sup> The difficulties in the definition of what exactly an artisan is, has long been recognised (Hanagan 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Kunene (2010) also touches on the uncertainty that characterises the debate on artisanal skill production and feels that it boils down to the challenges of legislative incoherence, policy disequilibrium and systemic inconsistencies.



# 1. BLOCKAGES IN ARTISANAL SKILLS PRODUCTION

The most simplistic understanding of an artisan is an individual that is skilled at practicing a particular trade or handicraft, the practice of which became regulated, in most cases, by belonging to a guild of some sort. The training is characterized by an aspect of vocational education combined with extensive practical training and experience. Traditionally, the term thus referred to a skilled manual labourer, firstly associated with craft related trades, but later also referring to those involving more manufacturing related trades. It follows that an artisan is a very skilled person and although he or she might do mainly manual work, this requires a fairly extensive technical and practical knowledge base combined with a considerable amount of experience in the practice of the relevant trade. However, the nature of, and status associated with, different artisanal trades is extensively shaped by their development in relation to the political, social and economic history of a country.

In South Africa, similar to the case in other countries, the main route to artisan status was through a traditional apprenticeship, but now, an individual can access qualified artisan status through a number of routes. This current state of affairs was driven largely by a decline in the apprenticeship system due to two factors. Firstly, at the time there was a decline in 'artisan-related' sectors of the economy. Secondly, just before the end of apartheid, there was rising pressure for another, more egalitarian system of training provision. The traditional apprenticeship pathway system was viewed as being deeply gendered and racialised, firmly dominated by white males (later the paper reflects more comprehensively on the decline of the system).

Consequently after 1994, the learnership pathway system came into being (promulgated by the Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998) in an effort to address the inequalities, inconsistencies and inefficiencies<sup>6</sup> of the traditional apprenticeship pathway associated with the old apartheid training regime. It was constructed to respond to skills development across a wider range of sectors and skills levels, in comparison to apprenticeships which addressed skilling at the intermediate (NQF 4) level, and in selected sectors only. The learnership system in South Africa was constituted along the same lines of the so-called "modern apprenticeships" emerging in other countries. This was not very different to the global changes (in countries like Germany, France and Britain) characterizing vocational education and training (VET) at the time and in many ways corresponded to the shift away from more craft related trades to manufacturing and mechanization (Gamble 2012).

Learnerships were deemed as the most important innovation in the intermediate skills development arena in the post-apartheid South Africa. However, in the face of continued and increasing shortages in artisanal skills, it became clear that the learnership system alone was inefficient in satisfying the need for artisanal qualifications. Research revealed most learnerships to be in the non-technical fields, focused at lower skills levels than those required for artisanal work (Mukora 2009). It was recognized that the apprenticeship pathway in its focus on intermediate level skilling in selected sectors constituted a valuable model of producing artisans. Toner (2003) in Elliot (2009, 16) supports that

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<sup>6</sup> Clarke (1999) describes craft apprenticeships as wasteful exercises in time-serving, using apprentices as forms of cheap labour.

“the principle reason for the shortage of artisans lies in the decline of the apprenticeship training system and emerging evidence that, as in other parts of the world, learnerships (traineeships) have focused on operator and process (machine minding) occupations and not on artisan or trades/craft occupations, i.e. intermediate level skills”.

Much effort has thus gone in to the revival of the apprenticeship system as one of the key pathways to artisanal status, trained via the two routes (Section 13 and 28) of the Manpower Training Act of 1981. In an effort to create clarity on the routes to artisan status and as a result of JIPSA’s work to establish a national benchmark for artisan qualifications, “four learning pathways to artisan status through FET college programmes, apprenticeships, learnerships and recognition of learning (RPL) through experience” (Skills Development Act 2008) were recognised. Apprenticeships and learnerships are therefore only two, but arguably very important, learning pathways to artisanal skills, out of a total of four. Available data on artisan development puts the contribution of apprenticeships as one of the four learning pathways, at roughly 55% during the period 2006–2009 (Elliot 2009). All of four routes culminate in a trade test, which upon successful completion, leads to the status of qualified artisan. Apprenticeships and learnerships thus remain the major routes to artisanal skills development in our country. Hence, emerging evidence of systemic blockages in these two pathway systems points to critical areas in need of further investigation.

## **1.1 PRODUCTION OF ARTISANAL SKILLS THROUGH LEARNERSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS IN SA**

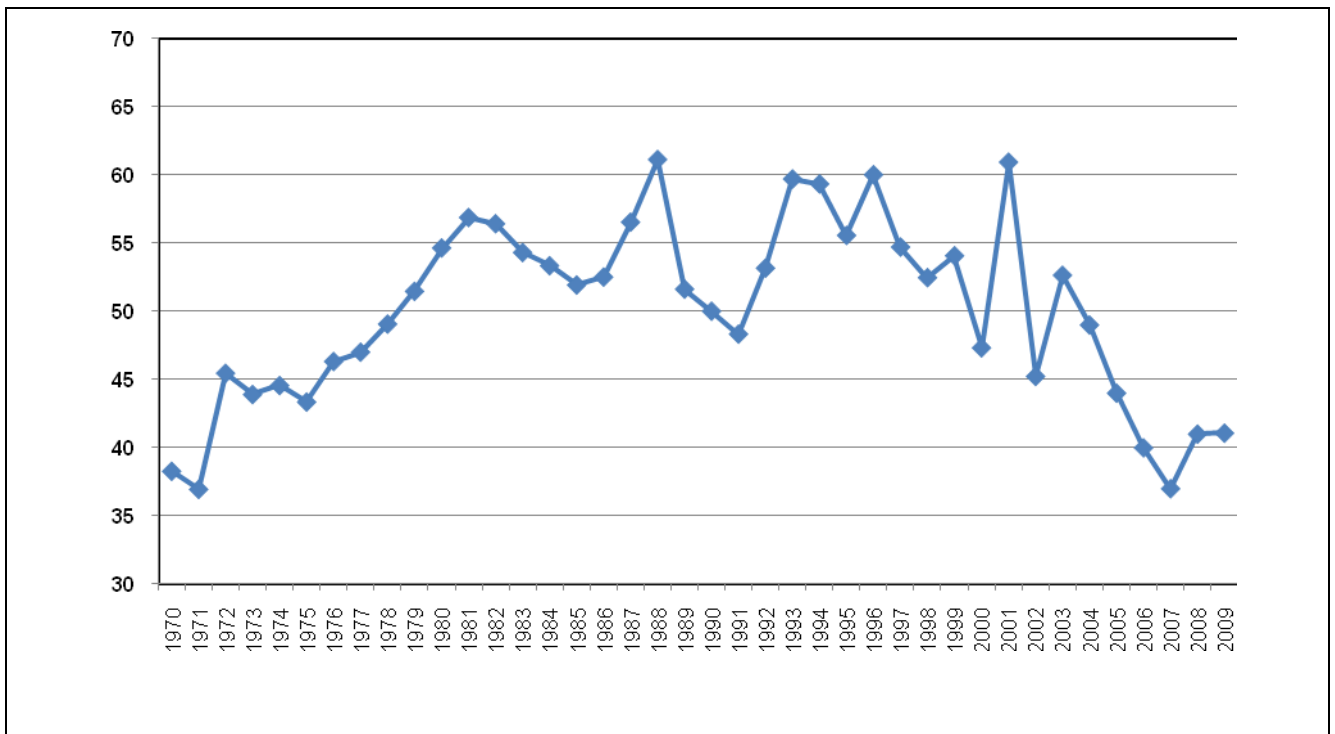
In a recent assessment of the impact of learnerships and apprenticeships in South Africa under the auspices of the National Skills Development Strategy II (2005/5 – 2010/11) (Kruss et al 2012), two key systemic blockages in the production of artisanal skills were identified.

The research project had three main components. Firstly, to establish the size and shape of the learnership and apprenticeship systems, databases of registration and completion of these qualifications were evaluated, as well as population data on those taking the trade test. Secondly, three case studies were conducted to gain insight into the sectoral issues that hamper or facilitate the production of relevant skills. Lastly, through the use of a pathways approach, an analysis of individual transitions and trajectories through learnerships and apprenticeships allowed us to evaluate the success of the systems in terms of their ability to support transition into employment. The combination of these methodologies illuminated the actual ways in which individuals navigate through these system, while also offering very valuable insights about their in/efficiencies.

### **1.1.1 Poor success in gaining artisan status**

In an evaluation of trade test data in the final year of NSDS II (2009/10), the research established that among those who registered for a trade test, less than half (41%) were successful. The 2 303 successful passes stand in stark contrast to the record pass rate in 1985 of 13 500 artisans. Figure 1 indicates the peaks in trade test pass rates in the late 1980s and early 2000s; where after a steady decline has been evident, now hovering at the 40% mark.

**Figure 1: Percentages of people who passed the trade test at INDLELA from 1970 to 2009**



Source: Van Rensburg et al (2012)

However, not only do we have to deal with very small numbers of artisans being produced annually, but closer evaluation reveals further signs of a dysfunctional system, in that 24% of those who passed actually required more than one attempt at the trade test. Elliot (2009) notes further constraints and problematic issues in artisanal development: the limited access to structured workplace learning, lack of relevance of FET college curricula in many instances, lack of properly qualified FET college staff, insufficient workplace training capacity, as well as insufficient assessment and certification capacity. The trade test should represent a gateway into the artisanal labour market, but in its current form it appears to be a stumbling block for far too many aspiring artisans. It is a key blockage that needs to be explored and better understood. These trends underscore, the importance of further investigation into the issues surrounding the quality, appropriateness and extent of preparation for the trade test.

### ***1.1.2 Artisanal skilling not seen as a viable first option***

It is increasingly recognized that entry into an artisanal occupation might reflect a preferred career choice (Unwin & Wellington 2001, Brockmann, 2010), but the dominant discourse continues to perceive these occupations to have a poor image and status. They are still viewed as a second-choice option for school-leavers (Pring 1995, Elliot 2009, Allais 2003). Our evaluation of individual pathways into the apprenticeship system<sup>7</sup> in South Africa supports this widespread perception with empirical evidence.

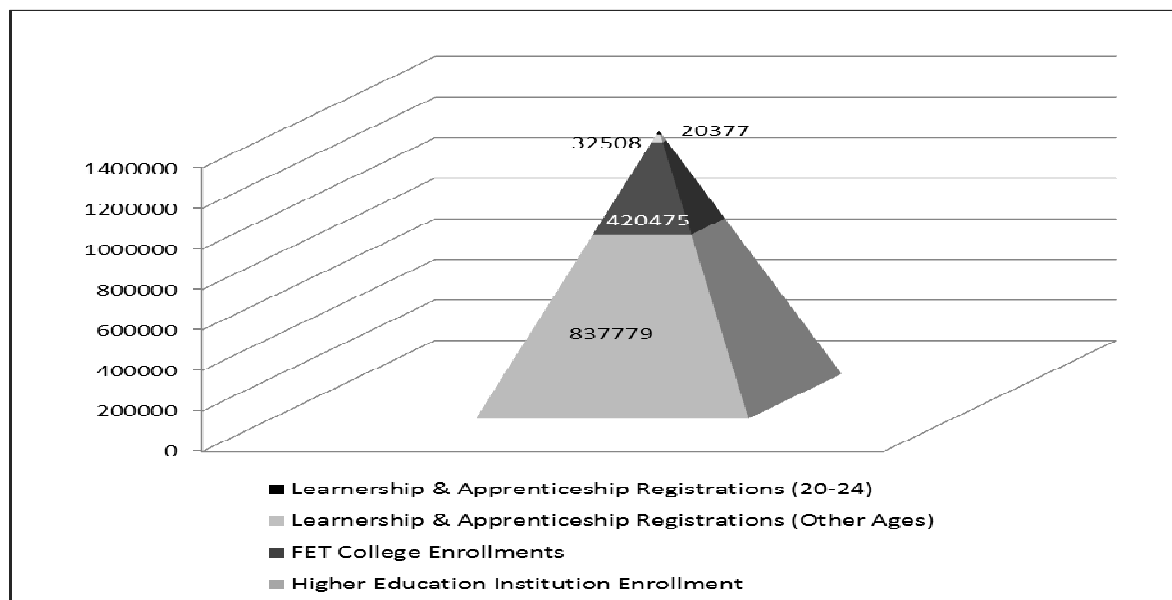
The study identified a significant feature of the apprenticeship pathway system in South Africa: individuals are not likely to enter into an apprenticeship directly after school. They are most likely to do one or two other activities (for instance work, or spend a period unemployed) before entering

<sup>7</sup> While we acknowledge, that apprenticeships are not the only routes into artisanal occupations, we have established before that it is the main route.

into an apprenticeship programme (Wildschut et al, 2012). The fact that school-leavers attempt some other activity before entering can be viewed as indication that other activities are deemed as first choice and higher status. It appears that if an individual is not able to pursue their first-choice, an apprenticeship is deemed the 'next best' option.

Despite empirical support for perceptions of low status, further investigation in fact reveals the value of these two systems, in that they lead to employment for the majority of those who complete their qualifications. The survey confirmed that the majority of apprenticeship participants that leave the system experienced a smooth transition directly into employment (70%) with an overall 76% finding employment after more complex trajectories. Similarly, 77% of those who completed a learnership were employed as their final outcome, the majority immediately after completing the learnership. The success of these systems point to the need to extend their scope and improve their status, as they reflect very low participation rates in comparison to other systems of education and training (referred to as the inverted pyramid<sup>8</sup> Figure 2). The low participation rates also reflect the higher value associated with qualifications in these other pathway systems.

**Figure 2: Participation rate of 20-24 year cohort in post-school education and training systems**



Source: Wildschut et al (2012)

So, considering the very positive evidence of success through these systems, why do we find a perception of low-status to be associated with artisanal occupations? History offers us a partial explanation. Technical education before 1994 was shaped by a system organized around a racially constituted labour market. Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this type of training in South Africa was focused on providing special education for black Africans as primitive people suited for nothing more than manual labour (Badroodien 2004), premised on the ideology that they needed to be taught simply how to work.

<sup>8</sup> The inverted pyramid is based on the fact that nearly three times more students gain access to higher education (HE) than they do the Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges. In other contexts globally, learners in post-school, pre-degree programmes constitute the vast majority of enrolments in the post-school system (Kraak 2012).

While this system was displaced in the 1900s, the Anglo-Boer war pushed a sizeable amount of Afrikaners into poverty. This combined with mining and manufacturing led industrialization as well as commercialization of agriculture, led to a growth in white urbanization. Job reservation for skilled work and trades were entrenched in the Mines and Works Act of 1911 and technical education was reserved for white learners. So, the technical education system sought to address, first, a political need to keep white voters happy and second, a specific skills requirement in the industry, mining and railways (Badroodien 2004). While whites could access training in pursuit of certification in artisanal trades, under the Bantu Education Act, technical training was offered to Africans at a sub-standard quality with the goal of providing manual labour for agricultural and mining interests.

So, initially, technical education served as a social rehabilitation project geared exclusively towards poor white learners who were perceived as having inferior intelligence in comparison to those from the wealthier classes (Badroodien 2004). Although this was supposed to take care of the 'poor white' problem, employers not only placed little value on this education but preferred to employ cheap black labour. These inter-related factors all contributed to the inferior status historically prescribed to work involving manual labour (Scrase 2003) specifically within the South African context, and underscores the importance of historical review to accompany a study of artisanal trades. Only an economic boom in the 1960s sparked a *de facto* restructuring in the racial division of labour, opening up the apprenticeship and artisanal trades landscape to Africans.

Thus, at different historical periods, technical training in South Africa has been characterized by inferior quality of education provided to both black and white students, with black Africans suffering the brunt of an inferior education system in the long run. In an era where a divide between technical /vocational and academic education existed that separated social classes, it is not surprising that social perception of vocational and technical education and occupations would associate this section of the labour market with low-status (Allais 2003). Allais (2003) in this respect argues that this perception hinges on the perceived differences (both historical and contemporary) in standard and quality between vocational and academic knowledges. What emerges is a question about the relationship between the systems of education and training and the nature of relative conditions in the labour market (political, social and economic) and how they impact on perceptions around value and status.

Answering this question means delving into the occupational milieus and identities that characterise artisanal occupations at a particular point in time, bearing in mind the historical trajectory that underpins it. It requires us to understand the sociological phenomena at play within a given political and economic context. And while we acknowledge the impact and contribution of history in shaping the status and identity of artisanal occupations and its systems of training, we have to recognize that the world of work has changed too much for traditional notions to be used as sole explanations for present phenomena in such occupations. Are choices illustrative of notions of low-status of these occupations? Are there other factors, such as culture or age? How do we go about changing such notions, if in fact they do still exist? How do we gain more insight into the work and learning identities in artisanal trades and occupations? Can we link certain artisanal work and learning identities to student success in certain aspects of a trade? How can this be used to find better ways to address poor throughput rates? These questions are situated at the interface of the systems of artisanal skills production and its labour market.

## 2. INTERACTION BETWEEN SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION AND LABOUR MARKET TO INFLUENCE THE NATURE OF ARTISANAL SKILLS

Interaction between the system of artisanal skills production and its labour market is characterised by the changing nature of work, particularly in the contemporary period. This in turn impacts on the nature of artisanal skills by shifting the boundaries between different forms of knowledge, skills, competencies and so too associated identities.

### 2.1 THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK AND TRAINING

There has been a range of empirical changes in recent decades to the nature of work which requires new theorization and further study (Burns 2007). Artisanal occupations have been particularly affected in terms of the pace, nature (Scrase 2003) and location of production in a globalised market. Maclean and Wilson (2009, lxxviii) usefully sum this up, stating that the field has had to respond to “changes in demand over time for skills and technologies used in workplaces, the globalisation of production, the increasing utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and related matters”.

The combined effect of globalisation and the increasing use of technology are hard to ignore. Technology plays an increasingly larger role in economies (both developing and developed) and thus impacts not only on what countries produce for global consumption, but also how that production takes place. The application of new technologies is often accompanied by structural changes (Christidis et al 2002) and so impacts on the kinds and configurations of skills required by workers at different levels. Moreover, organisations have become the major site and almost normative location of where the bulk of work takes place, so much so that it has led to the conjunction of occupations and organisations in many instances. In other words often, much more so than was the case in the past, it is the organization that regulates the behavior of individual members, rather than the occupational or professional grouping that an individual belongs to. For instance, whether a doctor, lawyer, nurse or mechanic, the majority work as employees in an organisation, and act on a day-to-day basis in accordance with the directives of an employing organisation.

These factors hold implications not only for the world of work, but for the related training systems. Maclean and Wilson (2009) highlight the important trends and changes in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in response to the changes in technical and vocational work and employment. The following themes emerge as important: the concept of learning throughout life, reverse transfer<sup>9</sup>, academic and mission drift and the shift towards preparing knowledge workers. The key shift remains the transition from a mix of 50% theory and 50% practical to one that is 80% theory and 20% practical, paralleling the transition from the Industrial to the Information Age. In sum, Mclean & Wilson usefully contribute to the debate by highlighting what is key in defining TVET in the immediate future and at this particular historical juncture:

“TVET is currently faced with the challenges posed by the displacement of the traditionally strong focus upon manual work in favour of mental work, or at least the changing mixture of

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<sup>9</sup> Maclean & Wilson (2009) refers here to the increasing trend of recent university graduates to add occupation-specific credential to their degree which have not yet led to their employment.

competencies required in the workplace... [and so] the boundaries between manual and mental work are fading away, as many traditional forms of work and the respective preparation processes for learning to work undergo change” (2009, xcvi).

We also know that shifts of the boundaries within vocational education and training also hold implications for the notion of what constitutes a professional or occupational jurisdiction. In this way Burns (2007, 74) notes that “the boundaries between professional and non-professional occupations continue to shift”.

## **2.2 THE SHIFTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE, COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS**

We know that what was required from an artisan in the past is distinctly different to the range and levels of skills required to be a competent artisan in the present and changing context.

These notions have never before been as contested as at present. The manual/mental divide has traditionally been conceptualized as reflecting the same divide between professional and vocational/artisanal occupations. Thus, the boundary between what is considered a profession or occupation, a professional or occupational skill, a professional or occupational knowledge base, is becoming ever more porous (Abbott 1988). The fundamental struggle as recognized by Abbott (1988) is one of jurisdiction, where an occupational group can claim exclusive right to engage in a specific task for society. Lewis (2011, 7) explains jurisdiction to be about “displaying what a profession or occupation knows (its system of abstract knowledge) and connecting that to what the profession or occupation does (its labour practices)”.

In this regard, we will have to engage with whether it is becoming important for artisans to professionalise in a labour market where skills might be increasingly shared across various occupations and professions. We recognize that “occupations professionalize to the degree that they can build and sustain exclusive control over expertise in the market or status in a social system” (Lewis 2011, 6). Could attempts to professionalise be the route to higher status for artisanal occupations in South Africa? If so, might this contribute to a better perception of entering into VET? Might this impact on the status of relevant professions and related occupations? How will this relate to artisanal identities that might be rooted in conceptions of skills that are contradictory to what is traditionally considered to be artisanal skills, knowledge and competencies?

Given the extent to which boundaries are shifting, we also need to ask, what will continue to separate professional and artisanal work? And, is such separation still realistic?

The changing nature of work and technical vocational education and training contextualizes the forces at a macro-level which underlie the changes we find playing out at the micro-level within artisanal occupations, specifically at this historical juncture. It then follows that a theme of study that attempts to understand changing occupational milieus and identities would require a framework that spans consideration of the micro through to the macro level.

### 3. PROPOSING A USEFUL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ARTISANS

It is becoming ever more pressing that we cannot simply identify and study only quantitative trends, but we also need to draw on different methodologies that can expand knowledge and understanding of artisanal skilling. I propose that the study of Sociology of Work and Occupations/Professions offers a useful theoretical lens and methodological framework for the study of the structural changes to the nature of artisanal occupational milieus and its associated identities. The basis for this assertion is elaborated below.

#### 3.1 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

##### ***3.1.1 Allows engagement with shifting boundaries between different forms of work and skills***

Academics and researchers have displayed a long-standing interest in the nature of work and occupations, as far back as Durkheim's analysis of the relationship between employment and the creation of social order in his book *The Division of Labour* in the 1880s.

The study of structural changes in work and its underlying knowledge bases, identities, status and discrimination, have traditionally been problematized in the disciplines of Sociology of Work and Occupations, and the Sociology of Professions. The Sociology of Work and Occupations may be defined as "the application of the principles and concepts of sociology to a particular social phenomenon – that of occupational life and people at work" (Maclean & Wilson, 2009: lxxv). It offers a broad theoretical lens to consider the changing nature of artisanal occupations, illustrated by Noscow and Form's (1962, 3) description of this field's five substantive themes:

- The social nature of work and its relation to for eg. leisure,
- Occupational structure and causes of change within it
- Study of individual occupations in terms of recruitment, training and careers
- Ways in which occupational structure and individual occupations articulate with other segments of society (for eg. social stratification)
- Study of a particular occupation in order to highlight a problem in broader society

Reflecting on the substantive issues examined in this area of study it is clear to see where a theme of work concerned with understanding changing artisanal milieus and identities, can be usefully framed. Our South African evidence raised concerns about low status and poor output as blockages to producing more artisans, but also at the same time, the issue of the changing nature of work, knowledge bases and skills requirements in artisanal occupations.

The first section of this paper touched on key obstacles that are hampering increased artisanal production at this point in time. Here one can draw relevance to the theme of *study of individual occupations in terms of recruitment, training and careers*. In this regard one investigate the current forms of recruitment into artisanal occupations – what are they, and what could be done to increase their effectiveness, for instance?



The status of artisanal occupations and TVET was also discussed. The relevant theme under the SoW/P which explores the *ways in which occupational structure and individual occupations articulate with other segments of society*, will offer useful comparative cases to contribute to the discussion of this phenomena in our South African context. Here we could consider, what are the ways in which other countries have attempted to deal with these linkages? Can these linkages be severed and how? Similarly, also relevant here is *the study of artisanal occupations as a way in which to highlight a problem* (such as the continuation of racial and gender inequities in artisanal employment). This allows us to study the link between various systems within our society, and how occupations form an integral part of either perpetuating or shifting such notions. The key contribution however, with relevance to exploring the changing nature of artisanal occupations, might be the opportunity that this area of work offers to explore, *occupational structure and causes of change within it*. This might be a very useful basis from which to engage with issues of shifting boundaries between professional and occupational skills, knowledge and competencies.

However, the Sociology of Work and Occupations is not without contention, and three stages can be identified to highlight its development over the years (Sciulli 2005). The first stage of literature and research focused on identifying the characteristics or traits of a profession in contradistinction from other expert occupations (referred to as the functionalist dyad or the trait approach) (Pavalko 1971, Greenwood 1957). While these sets of literature assisted in carving out a distinct field of study, its obsession with creating a list of identifiers for a profession neglected to draw the important link between professions/occupations and maintaining a structured society. In retrospect, many have argued that making this link more explicit would have given more credence to the endeavor of establishing what is a profession or not. Characteristic of this type of work would be a list of features provided in order to define the profession, and often included the following aspects in varying degrees of relevance:

- a specialized technical skill involving some degree of credentialism
- control over its own knowledge base - epistemological autonomy
- control over their own affairs, or self-regulating - institutional autonomy
- codes of practice enforced by regulatory bodies
- a very hierarchical and stratified structure
- power and high prestige in society
- a conservative nature (Morrell 2010)

Authors in support of such distinctions placed particularly high value on the societal status, power and prestige conferred upon a specific occupation as being pivotal to its inclusion in this category. Based on such assertions, professions were deemed as having a wider remit, a deeper value in society that breeds their higher status and confers upon them an even higher value as they are seen to be dealing with more compelling and crucial aspects of social life - than that of lesser trades (Morrell 2010).

Critical analysis of such a list reveals the weakness at that stage of conceptualization in the field. The approach did not achieve the clear distinction it had hoped to, but often caused much more confusion and controversy. It can be argued that many of these 'distinctive' elements could be found in artisanal occupations. For instance, artisanal occupations have their own knowledge base of sorts, autonomy over their own affairs and some are even regarded as engaged in specialized activity.

Furthermore, the extent to which a society values a profession changes with time, and so too, its status is not static.

In further support Trice (1993, 26) notes the similarities between professions and artisanal trades in asserting that occupations, whether perceived by society as having high or low status, establish “rigorous socialization experiences underscoring that the knowledge, skills and abilities are not easily learnt by just anyone and that they require a special learning experience and a special person to grasp them”. Thus, while trying to distinguish professions from other occupations, this stage of development in the field could also be used to highlight the similarities between professions and occupations. The trait approach to studying work and occupations was recognized as highly flawed, so that such criticism prompted a next phase in the field.

The second stage of research, termed the revisionist phase, referred to by (Burns 2007) as the power/conflict approach, encompassed a wholesale critique of the field where authors (Freidson 1970, Volmer & Mills 1966) drew out the negative results of professionalization for society in contradiction to the earlier claims that it contributes to social order. Here, the tendency for professions to engage in exclusion and attempts to maintain monopoly, and in so doing, maintaining inequality and societal divisions (Coney 1988), was extensively documented. Professionalisation in this way was sketched as the attempt to translate one order of scarce resources – special knowledge and skills – into another – social and economic rewards. This was seen as an effort to maintain scarcity<sup>10</sup> (of a particular skill set) and a tendency towards monopoly: monopoly of expertise in the market and monopoly of status in a system of stratification” (Larson 1977). During this stage, the proverbial ‘baby was thrown out with the bath water’ in that, due to the negative aspects associated with professions, the area of study was also deemed inappropriate. Here it was claimed that it is no longer useful to ponder about what constitutes a profession or occupation (Roth 1973).

The final phase, also termed the continental synthesis, in essence draws on the strength of each stage of the literature to redirect the focus of the field. It draws on both phases in an attempt to synthesise some elements of the earlier functionalist/trait approach with sentiments of the revisionist approach. It highlights the potential value in the field of study, to contribute to better understanding of sociological processes and phenomena in relation to work. This phase highlights the fact that the point of sociological analysis should not be to distinguish between occupations and professions. It highlights that while the area of study has received much criticism in the past, the strength of its contribution is recognized in the opportunity it provides for a focus on the “professionalization projects” (Evetts 2003) and the concept of “professionalism” within different occupations. In sum, the field of study has shifted its focus towards examining occupations specifically in relation to their claims to professionalism and efforts to professionalise.

The reader might ask, how is this discussion relevant to artisanal occupations in South Africa, and how can this contribute to a better understanding of the changing nature of artisanal occupational milieus and identities? While issues surrounding professionalism and professions and the

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<sup>10</sup> Freidson (2001, 17) illustrates the concept of scarcity in that what is very central to the idea of professionalism or a profession on the other hand, is “the belief that certain work is so specialized as to be inaccessible to those lacking the required training and experience, and the belief that it cannot be standardized or rationalized”.

knowledge, competencies and skills associated with them have received much attention in the 'traditional' professions, artisanal occupations have seldom been the focus of such investigation. I have argued above that we need to understand the sociological drivers of change in artisanal occupational milieus and identities, in an effort to better address the challenges we are facing to increase artisanal development. I would argue that using a Sociology of Work and Occupations approach offers a way in which to explore the changing nature of artisanal occupations, through engaging with the concepts of professionalism and professions. I am not singular in this perspective. Larson (1977) and Shudson & Anderson (2008) have made similar contributions. Articulating this perspective quite succinctly is Evetts (2003, 395), who asserts the use of the "concept of professionalism in attempts to understand occupational change".

### ***3.1.2 Allows engagement with shifting identities in response to shift in boundaries***

We know that work occupies a central role in the economy at the macro level, the functioning of our societies at the meso-level, and also at the micro-level, the identities of individual members of societies. This link is made explicit in the fact that occupations are a major source of personal identity, serving to locate individuals according to other social roles (McLean & Wilson, 2009). The world of work encounters our social context in various ways. An example is how job titles serve as prominent social badges: when we meet new people we often ask what they do for a living and expect to be asked the same question in return (Ashcroft & Kreiner 1999). Work occupies a substantial part of our lives (Pavalko 1972) and a significant aspect of one's identity is formed through construction of meaning in the world of work. Each profession or occupation will have different impacts on identity be it, self or collective identity. The identity and meaning that individuals obtain from work is thus a significant issue in the study of work. And so, equally important to understanding change in artisanal occupations would be an understanding of the accompanying changes to the identity of those engaged in artisanal work.

Thus, because we are interested in considering what is relevant to an artisanal identity, it then follows that an individual's work identity would be paramount in such an investigation. Walsh & Gordon (2008, 46) refers to "a work-based self-concept, comprised of a combination of organizational, occupational, and other identities that affects the roles people adopt and the corresponding ways they behave when performing their work". This is based on an individuals' identification with their work and the tasks involved in completing their work. The aspect of *social identity*, "a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group" (Stets & Burke 2000, 2250), would also be relevant in this theme of study.

Furthermore, because identity theory presupposes the continual seeking of positive reinforcement for the individual, the extent of this association with any type of identity will depend on the extent to which this identity enhances the individual's distinction and/or status within a given context. Thus, seeking positive reinforcement makes explicit the link between work identity and status. As is shown by Walsh & Gordon (2008, 50) "group identities that are quite distinct or status-enhancing to individual members are more likely to be adopted and expressed by them, especially if these perceived qualities enhance members' self-image". It is therefore clear that status and identity (personal and social/cultural) are inextricably linked, and both tend to impact on the nature of each other.

Individuals have a strong desire to maintain a positive self-image (Hogg & White 1995). In low-status occupations, of which arguably most artisanal trades have traditionally formed a part, it is very likely to form a strong occupational culture in order to “transform the meaning of their work, and in doing so construe an esteem-enhancing occupational identity” (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999 in Walsh & Gordon 2008, 52). Notwithstanding the mitigating processes that might be taking place in order for the artisan to maintain a positive work identity and status in the face of practicing a low-status trade, it is clear that status is something that is conferred by society on an occupation or trade. Silver notes, “social statuses encompass rights and duties towards others, and it is largely within the matrix of social interaction that the cultural significance of differing statuses emerges” (1980, 433). Illuminating the importance of one’s status associated with the practice of your occupation or trade, Mooney, Knox & Schacht (2000) note that a master status is considered the most significant status in a person’s life and a one’s occupational status is typically regarded as one’s master status.

Equally convincing are those authors that offer a different perspective, arguing for the decreasing relevance of occupational belonging to an individuals’ conception of self. Strangleman (2012) argues that work was once central to individuals and groups as a whole and people could carve out meaning and identity and be socialized into and through employment. But this has now been largely eroded through shifts in the nature of work, such as new organizational systems, technological advancements as well as rigid organizational cultures. And in this vein, one can and must ask, what would be the relevance of looking at identity if we are trying to gain insights into the drivers of systemic blockages in production, and the perpetuation of low status? How will a better understanding of identities assist in clarifying such issues? I would argue that identity is quite crucial.

A study by Brockmann (2010, 66) for instance, highlighted the centrality of identity for artisanal training in the “social norms and values of occupations and pathways, governing ideas of how apprentices are expected to behave and what and how they are expected to learn”. She makes explicit how a specific work and learning identity associated with the motor mechanic trade, affects the learning outcomes of apprentices. Students performed better in the more practical aspects and did not value the theoretical component and thus did very badly in that. Invoking the concept of ‘social identity’, she finds the motor mechanic trade to be conceptualised as clearly “that of a craftsman and an occupation with low theoretical content” (Brockmann 2010, 67). She found that the students did not cope well with the theoretical component of the training and as a means to regain some control against this experience, would resist the learning culture. She powerfully asserts that “students’ disposition to learning is strongly shaped by the social identity of apprentices” (Brockmann 2010, 68), and in this way highlights the practical implications of the social construction of a specific learning culture also highlighted by others (Bloomer 1997, Preece 2009).

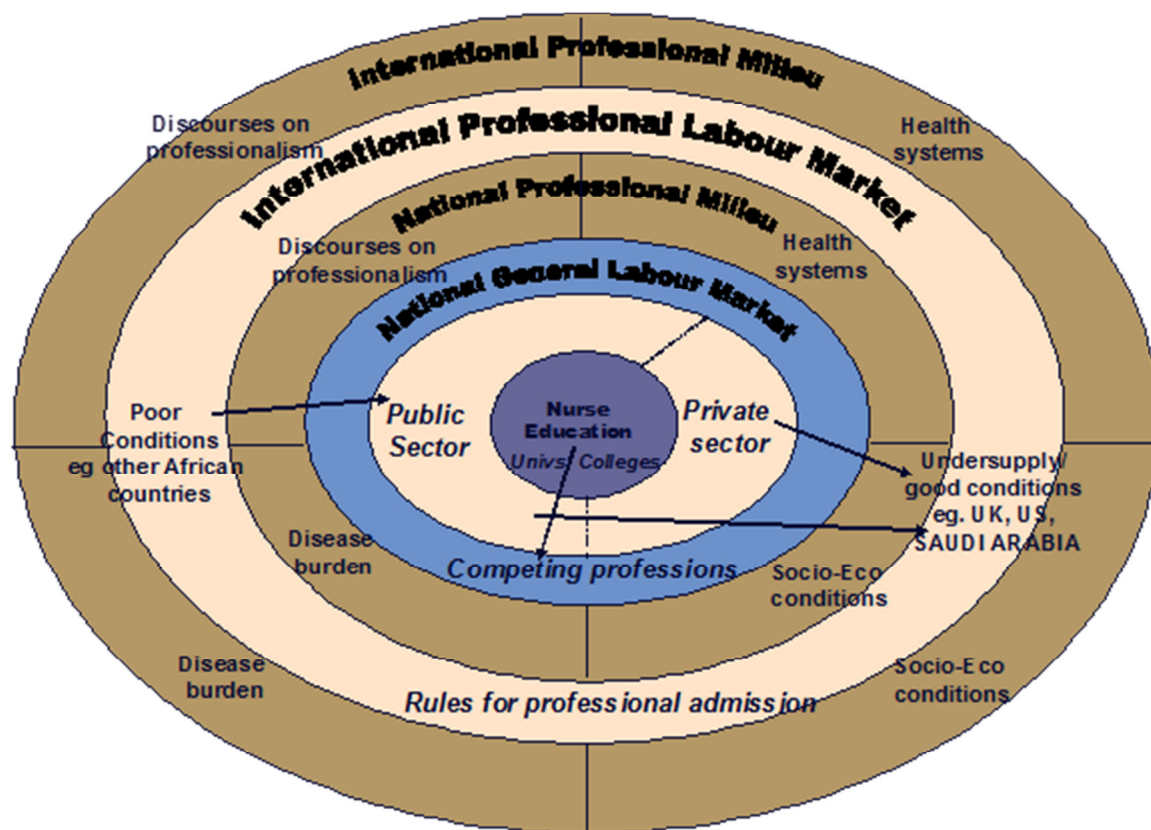
Thus, a study of apprentices’ identities could offer some insights into why our artisans are struggling with specific aspects of a trade, and maybe the structure of the trade test has relevance here. Torrence et al (2005) in this regard notes concerns with rigid and time-consuming assessment regimes that promote an instrumental approach to a qualification, countering any possibility of engaging and arousing the curiosity of young people. This has been confirmed in case studies in the Metals and Related Services Sector in South Africa (Mummenthey, 2012) where in some trades training to pass the trade test receives precedence over appropriate preparation for real work situations. As noted by Ecclestone (2007), a focus on getting students through the exams rather than on providing quality teaching can be evident.

In concluding this section, then, the theoretical and conceptual possibilities of employing a broad Sociology of Work and Occupations/Professions framework have been proposed. We have highlighted how this allows for engagement with issues critical to understanding changes to artisanal occupational milieus and identities. But the methodological possibilities opened up by employing such an approach are equally important.

### 3.2 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

The study of Professions also has the potential to contribute to the study of the changing nature of artisanal occupational milieus and identities by providing a methodological framework for the study of occupations. Completed studies of selected professions at HSRC offer a useful methodological approach to study the drivers of change for a specific occupation by evaluating its national and international milieus and labour markets. It allows an exploration of how changes and developments in each of these spheres interact to bring about certain outcomes in the relevant occupation.

**Figure 1: A model for the analysis of a profession and professional education, applied to the nursing profession and education of nurses in South Africa**



Source: Breier, Wildschut & Mgqolozana (2008)

A consideration of the *professional milieu*, requires investigation into the “socio-economic and political conditions that affect the practice of the profession, as well as the discourses of professionalism that determine what it means to be a professional behaving professionally in the particular profession concerned “ (Breier & Wildschut 2006, 3). Essentially this entails is a scan of the environment within which individuals apply their trade, or practice their occupation. It starts with “a consideration of the structural arrangements that underpin the practice of the profession: what it takes to become a professional and what rules, bodies and professional associations govern practice” (Breier & Wildschut 2006, 3).

Applying this methodology to the study of an artisanal trade would require then;

- a historical account of the development of the specific artisanal trade, as well as how this was differentially experienced by individuals of different classes, gender, age etc, within the South African context.
- a review of the bodies and associations, if any, governing the practice of that specific trade
- a review of the current and changing conditions (socio-economic and political) associated with the practice of a particular trade

A consideration of the *professional labour market*, on the other hand, investigates the “extent to which the supply of professionals from the institutions that produce them meets or exceeds demand” (Breier & Wildschut 2006, 3). This demand is of course influenced by the change in status and monetary rewards associated with competing professions or trades, both nationally and internationally. It is thus important here to consider the conditions in the local as well as international labour market, as these profoundly affect perceptions of the shortage, relevance and extent of demand for skills.

Such consideration is particularly important in a study of artisans in the South African context. It can be argued that changes in the international labour market and its influence through globalization, impacted on perceptions of the value and necessity of artisanal trades for production and society in general (Hallpike 1968). As noted by Scrase (2003, 449) “in various ways, and in specific regional contexts, the globalisation of production exacerbates, rather than diminishes, the marginal status of artisan communities”. Has this been the case for South Africa?

## 4 CONCLUSION

The paper has highlighted the changing nature of work and training, and shifting boundaries between knowledge, competencies and skills, as the key issues characterizing the current artisanal occupational context. The impact of these changes on artisanal identity and its clear link to status is emphasized. Based on these assertions, we argue that the changing structure of artisanal occupations, the consequent shifts in education and training and associated identities need to be explored more effectively in South Africa.

We close by proposing a set of three inter-linked projects that can build on each other to further our understanding of the changing nature of artisanal occupational milieus and identities. The three projects are complementary, proposed at different levels of analysis. In other words, while all will focus on issues of status, identity and inequality each will adopt a distinct vantage point: at macro, meso and micro levels of analysis.

- **Project 1: A historical account of the development of an artisanal sector, with particular reference to how this is influenced by shifts in the political economy of the country over time.** Such a review *at the macro level of analysis* would address questions of how specific occupations articulate with other segments of society, and how these dynamics are influenced by history. It would also shed light on questions surrounding the low status of artisanal trades within the South African context historically, and shed light on issues of racial, gender, spatial and age-related trends in participation.
- **Project 2: The study of the shifting boundaries between professions and occupations, and how this impacts on changes to artisanal occupational milieus and identities.** Such a *meso-level* focus will require a review of the national and international milieus and labour markets of a selected occupation and its related profession. The investigation will start with a review of the current and changing conditions associated with the practice of a particular trade and how this shifts in relation to the changing nature of work more broadly. It will also consider how a related profession is shaped by such changes. It will also touch on issues of status and social identity in relation to the profession or occupation. It will touch on issues of intersectionality in investigating how changes in work is differentially experienced by individuals of different classes, gender, age and other stratifiers within the South African context.
- **Project 3: A study of changing knowledge bases in relation to the changing nature of artisanal work and identities.** This project would investigate change at a *micro-level* and focus on changing knowledge, skills and competences. The project will use knowledge bases as the entry point of analysis of the change in the nature of artisanal work and skilling, in relation to a few focus artisanal trades. It will also examine identity, but in relation more to the internal bases of identity formation.

The analysis argues that we have been unable to successfully address key issues hampering the increased output of quality artisans in South Africa, because of a limited understanding of the context within which artisanal skills development and practice is taking place – historically, in terms of changing occupational structures, and in terms of changing knowledge and skills bases. Applying a broad Sociology of Work and Occupations/Professions framework at the core of a set of complementary projects will allow us to explore the nature of the synergy between the system of artisanal skills production and the labour market.

Using such an approach, builds a better basis for identification of appropriate interventions to address the critical problems of low artisanal occupational status and throughput. Simply establishing the scale and patterns of artisanal skills shortages will not inform how to address the problems. The proposed research will potentially provide more useful policy insights to direct the artisanal training system in the future.

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