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LOCAL VERNACULAR KNOWLEDGE AS A HYBRID LEARNING ECOLOGY: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION APPROACH TO THE WEAVING WORKSHOPS AT THE HAMEZI FESTIVAL

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Abstract:
This article examines weaving instruction at the Hamezi Festival in Eastern Crete as a form of locally embedded pedagogy within the wider ecology of lifelong cultural learning. Positioned along the continuum between formal and informal education, the festival blends structured workshops with spontaneous and socio-culturally grounded interactions. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2024 and 2025, the article explores how weaving workshops function as embodied, situated and community-rooted learning ecology in a setting where cultural participation and learning unfold simultaneously. Guided by an anthropology of education framework, and drawing on theories of situated and embodied learning, local knowledge, local/vernacular literacies, and the "education of attention," the analysis shows how novices become progressively embedded in craft communities through guided participation, shared effort, narrative exchange and gradual perceptual attunement to materials, tools and gestures. Research findings indicate that the weaving workshops of the Hamezi Festival constitute a hybrid learning ecology, in which tacit knowledge, embodied skill and local cultural values circulate alongside more formalized instructional elements, forming a pedagogical infrastructure in which cultural knowledge is both preserved and actively reworked. The study contributes to debates on alternative and informal learning ecologies, sustainable politics of local knowledge and anthropological approaches to teaching and learning broadly conceived.

Keywords: Hamezi, folk learning festivals, weaving workshops, anthropology of education, local knowledge, vernacular literacies, hybrid learning ecology

1. Introduction

Contemporary festival scholarship highlights festivals as complex social forms embedded in local histories, economies, and identity politics. Nowadays, admittedly, the

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range of events identifying as festivals is widening, encompassing a broad spectrum: from art exhibitions and music spectacles to folk dance and religious festivities or multicultural celebrations (Frost, 2016). The proliferation of festivals in the contemporary world is striking, while the concept of 'festivalization' has been introduced in the scholarly literature to describe the transformation of modern societies adopting festival-style underlying logic as key mechanisms of sociocultural, economic, and urban development (Roche, 2011; Négrier, 2015). Being rooted in collective life, dynamic and complex, they may also capture media attention, generate economic activity, and spark debates on identity, authenticity, politics, and artistic expression (Bennett et al., 2014; Frost, 2016).

The present article examines the Hamezi Festival in Eastern Crete, Greece, focusing on its' weaving workshops, as a hybrid learning ecology in which embodied, situated, and local forms of knowledge intersect with organized instruction. Folk learning festivals increasingly function as dynamic, communal lifelong learning ecologies where knowledge, skill, and identity are enacted, negotiated and renewed through active engagement. Situated at the intersection of formal, nonformal, and informal education, such events combine structured workshops with spontaneous, experiential forms of engagement. They constitute fertile pedagogical spaces where participants learn through doing, observing, collaborating and 'dwelling' in sensorially rich environments. Within this context, weaving holds particular significance: it is a craft deeply rooted within local heritage, memory, and aesthetics, while simultaneously serving as a powerful pedagogical medium through which skills, identities, and values are shared across generations.

Using the frameworks of situated learning, embodied and experiential approaches, education of attention, local knowledge and local/vernacular literacies, the article explores how participants in the festival's weaving workshops learn within an environment where practice, place, and community converge. Rather than treating the festival solely as a space of cultural celebration, the study conceptualizes the workshops (and the festival as a whole) as a pedagogical infrastructure in which cultural knowledge is produced, circulated, legitimized and reconceptualized beyond institutional curricula. The article, thus, pursues three main aims. First, it analyzes how weaving workshops integrate structured instruction with tacit, embodied, and locally valued knowledge systems functioning as hybrid learning ecologies. Second, it traces the learning trajectories through which participants become gradually incorporated into emergent craft learning communities. Third, it examines how the festival fulfills the broader aims of cultural learning, sustainability, identity-making and exchange.

Following the contextual description of Hamezi and a brief theoretical overview, the article presents ethnographic findings from weaving workshops, including their seminars and concludes by discussing the implications for anthropological understandings of education, formal/informal learning continuum, and community-rooted craft pedagogy.

2. The Setting and Issues of Methodology

2.1 The Setting

Hamezi is a small village of Eastern Crete, Greece, located 11 kilometers west of the city of Sitia, at an altitude of 430 meters. It is renowned for its skilled stone builders and rich musical and dance traditions. Traditional architecture is preserved, featuring houses with archways and courtyards, reflecting a strong emphasis on craftsmanship and community heritage. Cultural life in the village is supported by the "Educational Association of Hamezi," a cultural society which also runs the local Folk Museum. The museum, the former primary school and other communal spaces serve as cultural landmarks that are periodically reactivated as learning environments.

Since 2023, the Educational Association, in collaboration with residents and volunteers, has been organizing the Hamezi Festival, a grassroots community-driven initiative. The festival reflects a strong commitment to local identity and cultural distinctiveness, rooted in the village's enduring musical and dance traditions. It embraces a holistic approach to cultural learning, by offering a five-day programme of workshops/seminars covering traditional Cretan music (lyra, violin, laouto, mandolin, percussion), dance, and crafts (mosaic-making, weaving, and natural dyeing). Within the Hamezi festival's arts and crafts workshops, teaching traditional weaving stands out as a vital element of traditional cultural knowledge honouring ancestral wisdom while sustaining and adapting cultural practices in a rapidly changing world.

The research on the traditional weaving workshops began through an invitation extended in early 2024 by Venetia Galanaki, a conservationist and member of the festival's organizing committee, who planned (and taught in) the weaving and natural dyeing workshops. Having followed my research on weaving traditions and my broader interest in local knowledge systems, she invited me to participate in the Hamezi Festival as a guest lecturer, to speak on weaving and women's textile-making as part of the weaving workshop. This invitation facilitated my initial entry into the field not as a distant observer, but as a participant with an explicitly defined role within the festival's pedagogical infrastructure.

My first visit to Hamezi took place on June 6th, 2024, during the second iteration of the village's folk learning festival. Before the workshops formally commenced, Venetia and the President of the Educational Association (being also president of the festival's organizing committee) provided an extended guided tour of the village's cultural spaces, its former primary school, the repurposed loom building, the museum and the church courtyard. We also walked through the village and visited some elders' houses. This offered more than technical familiarity: it provided an embodied sense of how spaces, practices and people were interwoven. The atmosphere of preparation and enthusiasm that permeated the village with looms being set up, instruments tuned, spaces transformed into classes signaled that the festival was a temporally condensed, spatially distributed learning ecology: open public spaces such as alleys and private courtyards or

historical buildings (such as the museum and the old school) were turned into classrooms.

As an anthropologist, these first encounters foregrounded a crucial methodological insight: the field was not a static site but a world already in motion, shaped by rhythms of rehearsal, anticipation, and collective labor. This early immersion allowed me to observe the unfolding of festival preparations, which are rarely captured in formal program descriptions but central to understanding how learning environments are materially and socially assembled.

In the next few days, I attended Venetia's weaving classes, engaging with the participants and local women and gave a lecture on weaving as female poetics. This was repeated also in the third year of the festival, in mid-July 2025. Those interactions formed the basis of this study, which employs a qualitative, ethnographic approach to explore cultural learning within the context of the weaving and dyeing workshops at the Hamezi Festival.

2.2 Issues of Methodology

This study employs a focused ethnographic approach to examine the festival's time-bounded learning processes and socio-cultural dynamics, compatible with a contextualized and activity-specific insight. The compressed temporality of the festival and its weaving workshops offers a naturally circumscribed window in which practices, interactions, and pedagogical dynamics become especially dense and sensory-rich, making focused ethnography particularly appropriate.

Such an approach proves relevant to research contexts where the aim is to investigate clearly bounded practices in place and time within relatively short, intensive periods of fieldwork. Unlike long-term traditional ethnography, focused or short-term ethnography is characterized by problem-centred inquiry and immersion in specific activities (Knoblauch, 2005; Pink & Morgan, 2013). While it continues to address the emic perspective, this is pursued in a targeted manner, anchored in the specific contexts relevant to the research focus, illuminating only those selected elements of knowledge that are central to the activities being examined (Knoblauch, 2005).

Data collection methods included semi-structured and unstructured interviews with the President of the association, women of the village, and participants and field notes taken during weaving/dyeing workshops. Moreover, for the purposes of the research, I used a voice recorder to document the seminars (of both 2024 and 2025 workshops) with the participants' permission and consent, enabling a multimodal understanding of how weaving expertise is cultivated and shared.

From the outset, my position in the field was hybrid and multi-level. I entered as a guest speaker in the weaving workshop, as a participant-observer in the weaving and dyeing workshops and as an ethnographer documenting interactions, pedagogical practices, and festival rhythms.

Being invited to teach signaled trust and insider status, yet my presence and establishment as a researcher introduced the element of observation. Rather than

masking or minimizing this dual role, I made my research interests explicit to organizers, instructors, and participants. I approached it as a form of collaborative ethnography, aided by Venetia, who understands the research as aligned with her own goals of cultural preservation and knowledge free circulation and facilitated my integration into the setting of the workshops and the festival.

Moreover, being engaged in the workshops enhanced rapport with participants and my perception of rhythm, tension, bodily coordination, and the relational dynamics of instruction. It also enabled close attention to participation trajectories, embodied techniques, workshop interactions, material practices, and the spatial organization of learning activities. Observations focused particularly on how learning unfolded through doing, sensing, and co-presence.

At the same time, this position necessitated careful reflexive practice, particularly regarding authority and over-rapport and the risk of influencing participants' discourse around themes introduced in the seminar.

Theoretically, the research is guided by lifelong learning trajectories, situated and experiential learning, exploring how knowledge is constructed through embodied contextualized experience and social interaction in the weaving workshop settings. Additionally, the study draws on local knowledge and sensory frameworks to examine how traditions are preserved, adapted, and learned across generations, contributing to broader debates in the anthropology of education regarding apprenticeship, material engagement, and community-based learning.

3. Theoretical Overview

3.1 Anthropology of Knowledge: From Representation to Engagement

Anthropology has long focused on knowledge, with debates often oscillating between symbolic interpretation and practical engagement. It has also examined how knowledge is culturally produced, materially enacted, socially situated and empowered rather than being neutral and independent from context. Since the late 20th century, there has been a marked increase in scholarly anthropological attention to the diverse knowledge systems and related learning processes. Emphasis was given to indigenous and local types of knowledge, including practical skills acquisition across varied domains such as fishing or weaving and the critical role of context in shaping and dissemination of knowledge (Crickmay, 2002).

Early interpretive approaches emphasized meaning-making and symbolic systems envisaged in Geertz's (1966) differentiating between models of 'of' and 'for', a useful reminder that cultural knowledge can be both descriptive and action-oriented: the former is declarative, descriptive relating to the understanding of cultural meanings, while the latter is procedural and action-oriented, referring to skills applied in practice (cf. Fischer, 2005). Modern work foregrounded embodied, emplaced and procedural knowledge and agency, insisting that skills such as farming or basketry emerge through

performance, sensory engagement and contextual improvisation (Puri, 2013; Richards, 1993).

To advance beyond this binary, Fischer proposed a methodological synthesis that bridges natural science-inspired rigour ("*hard*") with interpretive depth ("*soft*") (Fischer, 2004a, 2005). Fischer (2004b, 2005) introduces the concept of enabling (or deontic) knowledge to describe the contextual, adaptive know-how that allows systems to function under uncertainty. Indigenous learners often rely on such knowledge when improvising with available materials or responding to environmental changes. Moreover, Richards (1993) proposes the term "*performance knowledge*" emphasizing knowledge enacted through improvisation and embodied performance: knowledge is action-oriented and performative, prioritizing embodied, adaptive, and context-sensitive know-how rather than abstract or codified knowledge systems (that is, practice over theory).

Studies of indigenous and local knowledge systems further show how traditional teaching and learning depend on interaction, oral communication and sensory experience, rather than abstract instruction (Ellen & Harris, 2000; Berkes 2009).

3.2 Local Knowledge Beyond the Formal/informal Split in Anthropology of Education

The concept of local knowledge (also known as traditional or indigenous or folk knowledge), refers to context-specific, experiential, processual and sensory/embodied understanding of our world embedded within the social and cultural fabric of all societies, being socially authorized, encompassing skills and adaptive intelligence that respond to evolving social circumstances and environmental conditions (Antweiler, 2004). This knowledge is often tacit, (re)generated and learned through interaction, embodied practices, oral traditions, and symbolic forms such as myths, rituals, and language, rather than through formalized systems and instruction (Ellen & Harris, 2000). Indigenous or traditional learning systems often merge empirical observation with applied strategies for survival and resource management (Fischer, 2004b). So, this approach emphasizes knowledge in practice, privileging situated, experiential and performance-based forms ovhenzeer abstract theory. Learning occurs through observation, imitation, and participation, aligning with Puri's (2013) emphasis on embodied skill learning. These knowledge types collectively illustrate that cultural continuity depends on both meaning and practical skill making, ensuring resilience and adaptability in changing environments. In other words, traditional knowledge, being intuitive, informal, uncodified (Ellen & Harris, 2000), involves "*constant learning-by-doing, experimenting and knowledge-building*" (Berkes, 2009, p. 154).

Although often associated with "*informal*" learning, local knowledge systems routinely blend structured elements, which refer to local traditional forms of organized training systems, such as traditional apprenticeship, with tacit, spontaneous forms. Informal learning takes place during an individual's lifetime as one reaches different life stages and enters various socio-cultural environments "*from daily experiences and exposure to the environment*" (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8).

The classic distinction between formal, nonformal, and informal education or the broader formal/informal dualism, has been widely criticized as overly rigid. According to La Belle (1984), those modes share overlapping characteristics, challenging rigid boundaries rather than forming discrete, inflexible entities. The differentiation between formal education as institutionalized and credential oriented, nonformal as organized yet flexible and often community-based type and informal as occurring through everyday practices and social interaction (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Lave, 1988; Henze, 1992) is far from clearcut: nonformal education often incorporates informal strategies such as experiential learning, while informal education may take highly structured forms through community initiatives (Lave, 1982; Henze, 1992). Moreover, Street (2005) proposes a continuum between literacy "*in education*" and literacy "*in use*," highlighting how knowledge emerges at the intersection of community practice and structured guidance; learning is embedded in local cultural practices rather than confined to formal, decontextualised instruction. Considered together, these perspectives demonstrate how learning in practice exceeds formal/informal binaries, combining structured routines with emergent, socially mediated engagement.

3.3 Embodied and Situated Learning, the Education of Attention and Local-vernacular Literacies in Anthropology of Education

Relatedly, Ingold (2000) expands Gibson's term "*education of attention*", which implies perception as a process of attunement enabling individuals to extract meaningful information from their surroundings through experience and practice. He uses the term to describe how people learn by becoming perceptually attuned to the environment through guidance, attentive, emplaced and embodied involvement and practice (Ingold, 2000, 2018). Learning is not about the transmission of mental representations or abstract information and fixed knowledge about the world, but about progressively cultivating ways of learning with and within the world. In his model, intergenerational learning occurs through correspondence and the overlapping generations, where skills grow through attunement to the environment and participation in shared practices. On the contrary, rigid scaffolding misrepresents learning as a staged construction process. Instead, he argues that intergenerational learning arises through correspondence and the overlapping lives of generations, where skills grow through shared attention, movement, and engagement with the environment (Ingold, 2000, 2018).

Ingold's perspective (2010, 2018) on craftsmanship emphasizes that skill develops through embodied correspondence with the environment rather than through the application of abstract cultural models. Moreover, Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (1991) positions learning as movement through trajectories of participation in communities of practice. Knowledge emerges from involvement in shared activities and from access to tools, materials, and social relations.

Situatedness is central to Lave's work (1982, 1996, 2019). She employs the concept of situated learning for emphasizing that cognition is inseparable from its social and

material contexts, so learning occurs most effectively in authentic contexts, being embedded in the activities, relationships, identities, shared materials and environments within the community. Furthering anthropological study of apprenticeship, Lave and Wenger coined the term "*legitimate peripheral participation*"/lpp (Lave & Wenger, 1991), pictured as a process of initiation, through which newcomers engage gradually in communities of knowledge and practice moving toward fuller involvement and participation in culturally meaningful activities, blurring distinctions between formal and informal. This aligns with Vygotskian sociocultural theory and the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning as a process of knowledge internalizing occurs by interacting with more knowledgeable others. This scaffolding interaction would then be the initial support from the expert, which is gradually diminished (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

For Lave (1996, 2011, 2019) a broader theoretical account of understanding in practice emphasizes that everyday activity and not formal teaching is the primary mechanism through which cultural knowledge is reproduced. Participation in social practices that embody the spatial, temporal and social structures of a society provides a more powerful form of enculturation than deliberate instruction. This implies a constant interaction between experience and understanding, where the oppositions between mind and body, reflection and action, or abstraction and practice collapse (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This framework aligns with Bourdieu's perception of 'habitus,' as embodied dispositions shaped by socio-cultural experience through which individuals perceive the world (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ingold, 2000). Social practice theory argues that knowledge emerges within the contexts in which it is used: through sustained involvement in everyday practices, people develop the dispositions and sensibilities that shape how they perceive and respond to their environment. Understanding is therefore not applied from outside but formed through action itself, as individuals learn to attend to the world in socio-culturally meaningful ways (Ingold, 2000). Consequently, learning occurs less through internalization or declarative instruction and more through active, embodied and situated involvement in a meaningful activity (Lave, 2019).

Parallel insights arise from vernacular/local literacy studies. Street (1994) and later Barton & Hamilton (1998) conceptualize literacy not as a technical skill but as a social practice, embedded within everyday activity systems, in local routines, values, and power relations. Increased recognition of local forms of knowledge within various educational contexts has highlighted the value of building upon existing community resources rather than overlooking them, with the Freirean approach contributing significantly to this shift (Street, 1994). Relatedly, Street (1994) uses the anthropological lens to understand the concept of local literacy/ies, understood not as neutral, technical skills but as a set of culturally situated practices (literacy practices) embedded in local histories, values, and power relations. In this perspective, communities develop their own meaningful ways of interpreting, evaluating, and communicating knowledge through everyday activities.

Accordingly, Barton & Hamilton (1998), based on Street's anthropological view of literacy practices, Scribner and Cole's (1981) cross-cultural psychological study of literacy as well as Heath's (1983) sociolinguistic perspective that learning is embedded in locally meaningful interactional routines ("literacy events"), talked about the dipole of dominant versus vernacular literacies: the first being shaped and regulated by social institutions and power relations while the latter self-generated, drawing on everyday life discourses and on a variety of domains. In this line of thought, vernacular knowledge and the related practices are less valued, less visible and supported, relying on informal and voluntary learning in contrast to the dominant-official literacies.

Vernacular literacies extend beyond reading/writing to include multimodal and material practices, making them useful for understanding weaving as a local literacy encoded in pattern repertoires, techniques, and communal recognition. In this, important is the notion of "*ruling passion*" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), that is, people's main interests that shape their literacy practices.

Moreover, global agendas for lifelong learning validate community-rooted/place-based, educational ecologies that operate across settings (such as festivals), generations and life stages where participation, place and practice converge to sustain knowledge over time (UNESCO, 2015; UIL 2021).

4. The Hamezi Festival and Its Weaving Workshops: Ethnographic Findings

4.1 The Festival as a Learning Landscape: Folk Learning Festivals

Several informants emphasized that the Hamezi festival was inspired by concepts and initiatives already successful in Crete, such as the Houdetsi music festival and the Meronas music school. As in the last case (cf. Koumarianou, 2023), organizers in Hamezi emphasized authenticity of tradition over commercial appeal. As the President of the Educational Association and head of the festival's Organizing Committee put it: "*Here we have an unadulterated pure tradition, and this was the first trigger for the festival*". While music and dance were central to the festival, the Society intentionally broadened the scope to include weaving, natural dyeing, and mosaic-making, thus extending the festival's initial concept and pedagogical reach across other folk arts.

The Hamezi festival has a clear and distinctive educational orientation. Its' pedagogical character was repeatedly underlined. The President of the Association characteristically said: "*The identity of the festival is first and foremost learning, that is it involves learning.*" Another informant confirmed that the aim was to create a meaningful educational and cultural experience for both participants and the local community. From an emic point of view, this commitment coexists with a focus on the preservation of tradition and authenticity, transforming the festival into a living site where cultural know-how is enacted, transmitted and renewed.

Festival events were distributed across the village: in the schoolyard, the church courtyard, the looms building, the museum, alleys, backyards and other open spaces. This dispersion of activity transformed Hamezi into a distributed learning landscape in

which space, practice, and sociality co-produce pedagogical affordances. Public elements of the festival, such as demonstrations, performances, exhibitions of students' work, and closing celebrations, recontextualized traditional arts and crafts within the context of a hybrid learning ecology, blending organized instruction with spontaneous and embodied learning, and legitimizing local knowledge through public visibility, communal recognition, and shared experience. Moreover, festival's programme combines goal-oriented activities such as seminars, workshops and exhibitions of the students' work, with participatory events such as the closing feasts and, blending in this way organized, organised instruction with spontaneous, communal learning.

So, viewed through the formality/informality continuum prism, Hamezi festival exemplifies the productive combination of structured, goal-oriented programmes with spontaneous, participatory forms of learning. In doing so, it demonstrates how traditional arts and crafts festivals may serve broader educational purposes, fostering continuity, identity formation, and intergenerational cultural exchange.

As also highlighted by the participants, the festival's broader spatial and temporal structure form a relational atmosphere that facilitates and reinforces situated learning. A. characteristically said: "*In this festival, I like the way that we coexist. There is a sense that the one is here for the other; you feel good intentions and the politeness, and all these are natural and spontaneous*."

The village itself turns into a learning landscape, a network of distinct learning areas/zones (e.g., the church courtyard, the loom building, the school area). Each space offers opportunities for interaction, observation, and engagement, making the learning process context-rich and experiential. According to M (from 2025): "*Passing on tradition is very important, and this festival rekindles it, from the seminars to the traditional cafés*."

So, folk learning festivals, as discussed here, function as immersive pedagogical environments, where sensory experience, material engagement, emplacement and intergenerational exchange co-produce forms of cultural learning. This resonates with anthropological approaches that privilege practice and performance over abstract representation, emphasizing the material, corporeal and emotional dimensions of cultural learning.

4.2 The Weaving Programme and Participants' Motivations

The weaving programme is central to the festival's educational mission. Workshops are led by Venetia and Malamatenia, two experienced weaving practitioners/craftswomen. The integration of traditional weaving and natural dyeing into the Hamezi learning festival reflects local efforts to preserve and revitalize endangered cultural practices as well as to diverge from other similar endeavors in Crete that focused on Cretan music tradition. In contemporary contexts, traditional weaving faces significant challenges due to the intensification of industrialization and globalization and the consequent acceleration of skill loss and degradation of local knowledge systems related to weaving and textile making (Kokolaki, 2018; Hwang & Huang, 2024). Recent studies in this respect examine ways that bottom-up local initiatives integrate traditional weaving into

community-driven experiential learning models for cultural preservation and economic resilience, while also analyzing how these grassroots efforts interact with top-down institutional interventions to sustain cultural identity and create socio-economic opportunities (cf. Hwang & Huang, 2024).

As conceptualized here, traditional weaving forms part of the local cultural knowledge system. It highlights the connection to the collective past and includes both tangible (artefacts, tools, materials and spaces) and intangible elements (knowledge, techniques, practices) that contribute to community sustainability. It reflects heritage, identity, and ecological awareness of indigenous and rural communities, embodying the deep relation between people and their environment (Kokolaki, 2018).

A key infrastructural development of the festival has been the restoration and installation of traditional looms in a repurposed building near the old school. Initially equipped and operating with four looms, as stressed by Venetia, the space expanded to accommodate six looms by 2025, enabling broader participation and paired learning. In this way, participant numbers in the weaving workshops grew from 10 (in 2023) and 11 (in 2024) to 13 (in 2025), with a concurrent widening of the participants' geographical reach: from local and regional learners to others from across Greece and from abroad. Learners were women, predominantly aged between 25 and 35, motivated by family heritage, artistic experimentation, or a desire to reconnect with tradition and community. This dedicated space, rather than isolating learning, keeps its doors open and functions as a village hotspot that blends structured elements with the lived, vernacular rhythms of local life. Situating weaving within local cultural knowledge settings, the programme foregrounds both tangible (tools, materials, spaces, finished textiles) and intangible (techniques, repertoires, aesthetic sensibilities) dimensions, and connects practice to heritage, identity, and ecological awareness (cf. Kokolaki, 2018).

Talking about incentives for joining the weaving workshops, E, a young participant of the 2024 course, voiced intergenerational ties: "*As I grow older, I think I connect more with the habits of my mother, grandmother and all the women in the family who, though, were not from Crete*." Indicative also is the comment of D, from Hamezi, who connected her interest in weaving to the local origin and family connections: "*I am D from Hamezi, which I think also plays a significant role. On the other hand, my mom is very traditional, and she had also taken weaving classes, so in general she put me in this process*."

Another participant from a nearby village, with some knowledge of weaving, narrated how she started learning: "*I took the loom out of the warehouse and started slowly with older women: one lady knew and would show me this, the other that, and that's how I learned some things. And I came here to learn a little more*."

In 2025, Z., a young female participant seeking her Turkish-Cretan roots, was trying to trace common patterns in weaving, while S, another participant having roots from a nearby area, joined the seminar to familiarize herself with loom operation in preparation for an upcoming art project in northern Greece, for incorporating loom sounds into art performances.

Others yet searched for universal unifying techniques and patterns. In the words of E: "*For a long time, I have been watching on social media artists from other countries, various common features that exist in patterns and such*."

However, some had little to no experience and links with weaving. A, for example, indicated a more do-it yourself modern attitude: "*Other than participating in some folk feasts, I had nothing to do with tradition and weaving. I think what attracted me was to do something on my own from scratch. A little bit of this… in the logic of making something useful out of nothing and use it*."

Participants enter the festival's weaving workshops with a variety of motivations reflecting "ruling passions" or habitus-shaped dispositions: familiarity with craft, forming part of family histories, gendered expectations, aesthetic sensibilities. These motivations underscore weaving workshops' polyvalence: a bridge to memory and lineage, a medium for artistic innovation and a site for learning-by-doing within a supportive community.

4.3 Embodiment and the "Education of Attention"

Venetia and Malamatenia, the workshop's educators, covered the whole pathway of the weaving learning process: from thread preparation and loom set-up to weaving plain cloth, to experimenting with more complex motifs and textures and pattern creation or finalizing the cloth.

Pivotal component of their teaching was tactile experience: hands-on sessions covered warp preparation, weft insertion, and plain weave (the basic technique) before progressing to sequencing more complex patterns and decorative motifs (e.g., daisies, cypress trees), experimenting with textures, various hand shuttles and designs. The integration of natural dyeing, aside from weaving workshops and the use of naturally dyed yarns in the classes, reinforced sustainable practices and deepened the material awareness central to the craft. The aim was for the participants to grasp how choices of materials, of the means, the procedures and rhythms or sequences affect the appearance and strength of the fabric. In this way, rhythm, precision, and attention to tension were taught.

Beyond procedural steps, pedagogy relied on perceptual attunement: learners cultivated sensitivity to tension, rhythm, texture, and pattern "feeling for" the weave's response. A participant (A., from 2024) reflected: "*From scratch you make a fabric, from the thread a cloth … And what has excited me about weaving is that it includes various processes that differ from each other. I mean, it's not just the crochet hook, where you make a stitch and you just go on doing the same. It has a lot: … from heddles to calculating, to designing the pattern you're going to make.*"

A participant from 2025 talking about her personal experience in the seminars reflected on the process of her own learning as a process of change and amelioration in both sensory acuity and craft judgment: "*When you start learning weaving, you dive into a whole new world. At the beginning, everything is strange and new: the preparation and assemblage of the loom, the warp setting, the weaving itself. Then, when I started weaving,*

everything seemed to be uncovering little by little. The whole procedure seemed to me very creative. It needs method, concentration, patience, inspiration, fantasy, respect and humility, so that you stay always alert, for not making mistakes. It is something in between science (knowing), art and kindness."

Through participation, they develop new embodied competencies, relational capacities, and craft-specific perception. This learning resonates with Ingold's notion of embodiment and education of attention, in which bodies learn to perceive relevant features through guided, emplaced practice. Skills emerge through guided, embodied engagement with materials, tools, and rhythmic movement, through doing, sensing, and responsive adjustments (Ingold's education of attention).

4.4 Participation Trajectories and Communities of Practice

In the workshop, novices began by observing or assisting with simple tasks, such as thread preparation, and gradually engaged in more complex activities, including warp setting. Then, they started working independently on weaving plain textiles and progressively experimented with more intricate motifs and more delicate textures. As their competence increased, learners assumed greater responsibility, moving toward fuller and more active participation in the workshop's routines. Participants often worked in pairs, especially in the 2025 workshops, with more experienced learners (such as returnees from previous years) paired with those less experienced. In this sense, experienced participants acted as "*cultural mentors*," guiding others less knowledgeable through shared practices. This structure mirrors Lave and Wenger's concept of "*legitimate peripheral participation*," whereby novices gradually move from observation to active contribution within a community of practice.

Participants emphasized the feeling of cooperation, collectivity and group support. E, a participant in the 2025 workshop, felt that "*Sense of community and participatory teaching was the most important feature of this workshop*." Chr, a young participant from 2024, explained the benefits of the collective work: "*I have absorbed knowledge, I feel I have really taken something from each and every one, because weaving may be a solitary occupation, but in this context of the workshop, it is done participatorily and with companionship*." S (from 2025) said "*I've enjoyed spending time with all the girls of the workshop, I felt at ease, sharing knowledge and feelings*." As most participants stressed, their teachers' ongoing support was also very important. For example, S (from 2025) held "*our teachers were always there supporting us with patience*" and another yet (A from 2025) "*we took information, instruction and practice and we will certainly try to experiment further with our creative fantasy as our teachers showed us*."

The workshop thus operated as an emergent community of practice, scaffolded by teachers, materials, and peer mentors, a process of "*learning by doing and learning by interacting*" (Comunian, 2015, p. 64), with trajectories that aligned with legitimate peripheral participation: learners move from observation/minor tasks to fuller contribution, gaining gradually competence, confidence, and responsibility. Within this

process, participants' expectations, motivations and habitual dispositions are both activated and reshaped.

4.5 Vernacular Literacies and Public Recognition

In the workshops, learning extended beyond technicalities. Demonstrations, conversations around and about the loom, such as the naming of the parts of the loom, of techniques, threads and motifs as well as deciding for exhibits, the final public display and the certificates operate as public/vernacular literacy events through which knowledge is made visible and locally meaningful and legitimate (Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Local women enriched the experience by stopping in and sharing trousseau pieces and personal stories, deepening cultural and emotional connections and offering insight not only into the discipline, patience, and embodied skill associated with traditional weaving but also into the rural social fabric of Hamezi, where weaving was traditionally performed by female household members, being a cornerstone to domestic sustainability. Within these interactions, linguistic markers underscoring weaving's gendered domain and socio-cultural agency were also discussed: several local women (and some men passing by the loom-room) argued that the loom should be called *argastiri* (lab) rather than *argaleios* (loom). In the broader local context of Eastern Crete, *argastiri* would refer both to the loom and to the domestic space that accommodated it. These impromptu interventions illustrated how local know-how circulated beyond structured instruction, complicating simplistic distinctions such as teacher and learner or formal and informal learning ecologies.

In that context, "*local literacy*" in the Hamezi weaving workshops was multimodal (not only material), sedimented in textures, colours and patterned repertoires that encode memory, affiliation and value (cf. Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). The workshops thus cultivated local vernacular literacies as shared ways of seeing, saying and making that are imbued in place and circulate through participation and interaction, in the sense of a community of practice (cf. Wenger, 1998; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012).

4.6 Theoretical Seminar: Weaving as Female Discourse

Drawing on the observations from the preceding hands-on sessions and informal exchanges with participants, I delivered a seminar on the final day of the festival (in 2024 and 2025) shortly before its conclusion. The seminar was built on the exchange of emotions, experiences and practical insights, as well as knowledge, and focused on traditional weaving as a gendered cultural practice and a form of female empowerment. Together we explored the historical and symbolic dimensions of weaving, emphasizing its role as a craft traditionally transmitted through generations of women.

The discussion traced weaving's embeddedness in domestic and communal life and its role in meeting practical needs and enabling creative expression, so it touched the essence of local cultural learning and gendered enculturation. Participants and local women shared testimonies that highlighted weaving as a gendered, domestically

situated practice: trousseaux, publicly displayed before marriage, were esteemed signs of female competence, household respectability and social standing (cf. Kokolaki, 2018). Skills were learned at home, with girls progressing from observing and assisting to weaving around adolescence, signalling integration into the female social sphere (cf. Kokolaki, 2018).

Participants and teachers emphasized whole-body engagement with eyes, hands, and feet in synchrony, combined with strength, precision, rhythm, coordination, patience, discipline, memory, imagination, and aesthetic judgment. Mastery relied on a broader repertoire: patterns, specialized vocabulary, color combinations, processes, and refined sensitivity, often transmitted within families and tied to ancestral practices and collective memory. Weaving thus exemplified holistic education: practical competence intertwined with personal development, cultural continuity, and community resilience.

Some participants' narratives connected weaving to family memory, identity, and continuity. Several highlighted ambivalences inherited from earlier generations (e.g., weaving as obligation), while others stressed weaving today as a choice, an artistic endavour and a form of therapy. The discussion turned to the evolving role of weaving in modern contexts. Participants considered how the practice has shifted from necessity-driven household production to a form of cultural expression, leisure and empowerment. This transition was linked to broader themes of sustainability, cultural preservation, creative autonomy and agency in the sense of a female poetics (Kokolaki, 2018). L (from 2025) characteristically said: "*It is an amazing experience that instilled in me a great respect for the female weavers through the centuries*."

Participants engaged particularly with the idea of weaving as a form of counter-discourse: an embodied practice through which women have historically articulated values and emotions, resisted marginalization, and sustained livelihoods. So, they stressed the agentic and communitas (cf. Turner, 1977) aspect not only of the workshop but of the festival as well.

In this respect, M talked about her own conflicting attitudes and feelings towards weaving: "*In the old days, our mothers used to say that if you don't go to school, I'll get you a loom. It was like a punishment. That's why I get a little confused inside, I don't know if I love it or if I hate it. For women, it was slavery*." This inner conflict characterizes female perceptions in traditional societies (cf. Kokolaki, 2018).

Another participant, E-K (in 2024), talked about the danger of romanticizing and idealizing the past and female life: "*We must not romanticize weaving. Now that weaving is a woman's free choice, and we do what we want, it is, of course, something liberating. But in the old days, it wasn't like that. In addition, from working in the factory or elsewhere, you had to work... They were slaves*."

Pointing to the artistic and creative aspect, X (participant in 2025) said: "*My thoughts revolve around the diachrony of art: although everything changes, it continues to inspire against time and odds. It illuminates and is illuminated through time like the sun*."

The therapeutic aspect was also brought forward in 2024 and 2025. In the 2025 workshop, M stressed: "*The experience from the weaving seminars has enriched me with many*

feelings and knowledge. Weaving is a difficult art that needs patience and perseverance; however, it is also very therapeutic." Other yet observed:

> E: "*It is very powerful when people work together for a common goal*"
> C: "*Weaving as female poetics unites us all. Our lives were interwoven for a week here at the looms, and our threads were united for a while at a unique experience full of colors, laughter, creativity and human experience*."

Although weaving is related to personal endeavor and mostly done in isolation, the seminar offered a sense of collaboration by sharing knowledge and labour. This sharing in the past happened through cultural learning/enculturation, as usually the older generation would teach the secrets of weaving (often kept as family secrets) to the girls of the household. This contrast between learning or performing weaving within the household and weaving as an act of sharing knowledge and feelings outside the walls of the household was evident in the participants' reflections:

> P: "*What I mostly like in the seminar is that we performed in groups something done in solitude."*
> B: "*What I truly appreciated during the seminar was the opportunity to engage collectively in something that is usually a solitary activity."*

These reflections resonate with broader historical trajectories: from depreciation of traditional/household weaving that occurred following the Industrial Revolution to early feminist critiques of traditional gender roles that rejected fiber arts/crafts as symbols of female domestic confinement and subordination and, finally to the contemporary revival of textile arts among younger generation seeking sustainability, connection, and embodied expression through digital platforms and online sharing (Kokolaki, 2018; Luckman, 2013; Collier, 2011). Feminist scholarship has explored how textile arts challenge patriarchal structures and reclaim marginalized narratives (Collier, 2011; Corso-Esquivel, 2019). Johnson and Wilson (2005) argue that textile practices offer women a sense of place and connection to personal and cultural histories, while Riley (2008) emphasizes the role of textile-making in fostering self-awareness and collective identity. Moreover, their therapeutic potential (being meditative and introspective, healing and supporting emotional well-being) is highlighted (Collier, 2011; Reynolds, 2002; Wellesley-Smith, 2015).

Within this renewed context, traditional weaving has re-emerged not only as a cultural practice but also as a form of counter-discourse, as a "female speech", a performative and symbolic language of resistance and agency through which stories are (re)told, values are articulated and roles are (re)imagined and negotiated within both secular and sacred dimensions of life, allowing women to reclaim space and articulate identity beyond dominant, male-centered narratives (Kokolaki, 2018).

The seminar utilized the participants' reflections and experiences from the workshops, which had fostered a tangible, embodied and emotional connection to the material culture of the region. Their engagement underscored the transformative potential of weaving not only as a traditional craft or folk art but as a powerful medium of embodied cultural expression and social agency, helping women to reflect and claim social status and value. The seminar closed with shared recognition of weaving as living tradition: a practice that shapes women's lives, fosters community, and bridges past and present through threads of meaning and memory.

5. Discussion: The Liminal Spacetime of Weaving Workshops as Hybrid Learning Ecology

Participants repeatedly framed the weaving workshop as a rupture from everyday acceleration. In specific, a participant from 2024 paralleled the particular spacetime of the workshop to a 'time capsule' saying "*During this week I feel like I've entered a time capsule*", while another expanded it adding emphasis to participation, collective spirit and sense of communitas: "*And I've entered into this time-capsule with everybody and I love it so much*". E-K (in 2025 workshop) captured this in a poem titled "The Loom as an Act of Resistance," where the workshop's loom room becomes a fortress with its walls forming a shield against accelerated time, reclaiming ownership of time through treadle steps and shuttle throws. Those metaphors point to a temporal reconfiguration intrinsic to festival life. In Turner's terms, the festival suspends routine structures to create a liminal spacetime of "*betwixt and between*" a zone of intensified sociality (communitas) and experimentation (Turner, 1977), while Falassi's "*time out of time*" captures how festival time enables alternative rhythms and modalities (Falassi, 1987).

In Hamezi, the loom-room materializes such slow/alternate spacetime: the weaver's rhythms become units of a lived temporality, recalibrating attention from the measured (deadlines, outputs) to the sensorial and relational (feel, care, companionship). This shift is not simply representational; it is pedagogical. By resetting rhythms, receptivity (towards others, materials and place) is heightened, thus priming the conditions for learning.

Situated at the intersection of social practice, vernacular/local literacies, and embodied learning, the case of Hamezi's weaving workshops (including the whole festival's experience) offers a grounded illustration of how knowledge is constituted within the life-worlds of the community.

When framed as learning ecology, the festival's spatial and temporal organization –its structured workshops, performances, spontaneous cultural exchanges and communal gatherings– creates dense, affective contexts within which learning becomes emplaced, relational and embodied. The loom-room immersed in the fabric of local life becomes part (rather than "set-apart") of a sensorially charged learning milieu. Weaving workshops, where participants may handle artefacts, move, adjust or fix parts of the loom and engage in making, responding to rhythms, textures, materials and synergies, form a

relational field through which dispositions, materialities and skilled perception converge and develop within locally meaningful environments and through social relations.

This articulation resonates with Ingold's (2000) "*dwelling perspective*", a nexus of ongoing ecological relations of people moving in the world and along with it: "*It is through such attentive engagement, entailed in the very process of dwelling, that the world is progressively revealed to the knowledge-seeker*" (Ingold, 2000, p. 216). Within this ecology, the weaving workshops illustrate further what Ingold calls an education of attention: learning as perceptual attunement and correspondence with materials, tools, and movements, rather than the application of pre-specified rules (Ingold, 2000; 2001; 2018). The loom, fibres, and gestures form an ecology within which skill grows through doing, sensing tension, rhythm, and pattern and responsive adjustment. Weaving thus operates as active emplaced, and embodied learning where stories, techniques and moral economies of craft circulate, binding participants to place and community. In this public local setting, the loom becomes a pedagogical device and the act of weaving a collective learning experience.

At the same time, the workshop's dynamics align with Lave's account of situated learning. Novices enter weaving as legitimate peripheral participants, moving from observation and minor tasks toward fuller involvement in tasks as competence, confidence, and responsibility expand (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2011). So, learning turns into a socially organized participation in ongoing practice, scaffolded by relationships, tools, and shared repertoires.

Reading the festival through local-vernacular literacies further sharpens this observation and clarifies how talking around the loom, naming parts and motifs, deciding exhibits, and public demonstrations function as literacy events that make craft knowledge visible and legitimate locally (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Furthermore, findings indicate that formal, informal and nonformal modes are overlapping rather than discrete and clearly distinguishable. Learning in the weaving workshop traverses these categories, displaying structured sequences, tacit guidance, and community validation. Ethnographies of learning in Greece and elsewhere have shown that everyday craft/apprenticeship can be highly organized and cognitively rich, unsettling rigid binaries and supporting hybridizing. In particular, Henze's (1992) ethnographic study in a Greek community illustrates how implicit informal learning – embedded in everyday tasks– may be structured and demanding, cultivating complex cognitive skills, while also formal teaching may be understood as encompassing levels of formality, reinforcing the idea that learning is distributed across settings and relationships.

As Lave also observed in her fieldwork with Liberian tailors, whilst apprenticeship initially appeared to be a straightforward example of informal learning proved to be organized, routinized, demanding and complex educational form, thus unsettling the conventional formal/informal dichotomy within the anthropology of education (Lave, 1982; 2011). This approach resonates with La Belle's continuum model, encouraging us to see how each educational mode contains features of formal, non-

formal and informal types; so rather than isolated categories, they could be envisaged as overlapping configurations of educational practice within a scale of emphasis of predominant characteristics (La Belle, 1984).

Bringing these strands together, hybridity in the Hamezi weaving workshops is both programmatic and processual, blending the features of an organizing, structuring principle with those of an ongoing, practice-based process. In the programmatic, structural sense, the festival integrates recognizably formal elements such as schedules, schemas, curricula, purpose-driven, deliberate instruction, public assessment through exhibitions and even certificates. In the processual sense, learning unfolds through informal trajectories: participation responsive to local input, on-going and dynamic experimentation, embodied involvement, and learning by doing. It develops through ecological attunement, participatory trajectory, and vernacular literacy practice. In the weaving workshops, knowledge is scaffolded primarily through interaction, observation, narrative and shared performance more than through de-contextualized curricula or abstract rules. The Hamezi folk learning festival may, therefore, be understood as a hybrid pathway of lifelong learning combining local endorsement (local literacies), attunement (education of attention), and apprenticeship (lpp) within a single pedagogical ecology.

This hybrid ecology is not only incorporated in festival's design, which encourages emplacement and cultural immersion through the incorporation of structured educational assemblages (such as the workshops and seminars), but it is amplified by facilitating spontaneous cultural exchanges, fostering accessibility and inclusivity across age groups, and foregrounding flexibility, cultural relevance, and learner agency.

Consistent with the anthropology of education, teaching and learning are here broadly conceived to include diverse forms, contents, processes and contexts used in constructing, acquiring, and transforming knowledge (Pelissier, 1991). Moreover, learning appears as a culturally situated and socially mediated process and praxis, embedded in local webs of meaning, power and practice, rather than a neutral transmission of information (Ingold, 2018). A broad-spectrum view, moreover, validates learning occurring in festivals, craft workshops, and other community settings and encourages educational practices that honor diverse learning trajectories and pedagogies that cultivate creativity, problem-solving, participation, re-negotiation and cultural awareness.

6. Epilogue

Just as threads interlace to form a fabric, participants' trajectories interweave into a collective cultural meshwork, to borrow another Ingold's term (2015), sustaining individual growth and collective resilience across generations. Weaving, though, offers more than a metaphor: it offers an instance for thinking about lifelong learning and local literacies.

In Hamezi, threads of instruction (such as the programme structures), threads of attention (mainly rhythm, tension and pattern), threads of relationships (communitas and peer scaffolding), and threads of recognition (such as final exhibitions and certificates) interlace into a 'fabric' of pedagogy that is at once embodied, local and public. Participants' wording like "time capsule," "fortress", or "companionship" anchors this pedagogy in lived experience, showing how festivals reconfigure time, redistribute expertise, and authorize local knowledge in alternate ways, distinct from formal classrooms.

As a community-rooted learning ecology, where learning is deeply integrated within the specific spacetime, the Hamezi Festival demonstrates how cultural practices endure not by preservation alone but by attunement, participation, and renewal. Its weaving workshops braid structured instruction with embodied coordination, apprenticeship trajectories and vernacular literacies. The workshop seminar refocused weaving as female discourse and counter-narrative, holding space for ambivalence and recovery towards histories of female labor and constraint, while participants brought forth cultivating choice, bonding, creativity and healing. Public sharing and recognition through the final exhibition intensify the emplaced experience. Together, these dynamics instantiate a hybrid community-rooted learning ecology not by accumulation of representations but by the cultivation of responsiveness to materials, to others, and to place and by sustaining identities, relations, and futures.

Research limitations include the time-bound character of the fieldwork as participation was limited to an annual event observed twice, and the predominantly female participation in the workshops, which shapes the case study's specificity. Yet, the specific case may sharpen how we might understand and design such endeavours across festivals, community schools or heritage projects. The implications extend to wider discussions on anthropological views on learning: community-based, place-sensitive, and craft-centred pedagogies can revitalize local knowledge systems, strengthen cultural continuity, and foreground the value of embodied, intergenerational, place- and practice-based ways of knowing.

Finally, returning to E-K's poem, the loom-room simile to a fortress may not need to be interpreted merely as a protective shield or an escape but as a commitment: reclaiming time for learning that matters, sustaining meaningful relations that teach, and keeping the threads of tradition in motion while opening space and allowing for new patterns to emerge.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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