



Ecuadorian artisanal production and its future projection from the Cultural and Creative Industries perspective (CCI)



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ABSTRACT

Craftsmanship or artisanal production, like many other forms of expression of people and cultures, has enormous value in terms of history and means of production. This fact is appreciated, not only because products are created by skilled hands, but also because they can transmit history, customs and Experiences that introduce the user into a worldview of a country or region. These characteristics, along with the creativity of the artisan, establish artisanal production as one of the sectors that make the Cultural and Creative Industries; a sector considered to be a strategic driving force of developing nations; a fact that has led Ecuador to take its first steps towards its development.

1. Introduction

Ecuadorian artisans have suffered the effects of problems, such as limited access to financing, shortage of raw materials, limited production capacity, the interests of third party intermediaries, a non-existent organizational business structure and minimum access to technological resources; along with a lack of organization and scant action on the part of associations or cooperatives formed by small-scale artisanal producers (Uribe n.d., 141–142).

Faced with this situation, the Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir (National Development Plan) undertaken by the Ecuadorian state seeks to solve these problems by establishing the basis and lines of action for addressing the issues surrounding artisanal production in the country. The National Secretariat for Planning and Development (Senplades, 2013, 65–187) proposes craftsmanship as one of the priority productive sectors. As well as supporting and preserving knowledge and production techniques; they are also looking to raise the profile of artisanal production to give it a similar impact as that of other industries.

The limited scenario in which Ecuadorian craftsmanship has been developed can be attributed to the lack of specialized human resources in the areas of support for the development of new products, their dissemination and improvement in productive processes within the limits defined by artisanal production, a factor that should be borne in mind when implementing projects that foster the development of the sector based on innovation and new products.

This limited scenario in which Ecuadorian handicrafts have been

developed should include the lack of specialized human resources in the areas of support for the development of new products, their diffusion and the improvement of production processes within the limits that define the handicrafts; It should also be borne in mind that handicrafts, as part of CCI, will be affected by discrepancies and inconsistencies between concepts and definitions concerning this industry (Bakhshi & Cunningham, 2016; Cunningham, 2002; Gall oway & Dunlop, 2007; Martí-Costa & Pradel, 2012; Peck, 2005; Prada, 2015), and therefore, the implications that can be generated to make the right decisions when carrying out development projects should be analyzed in the future.

Throughout this article it is presented the bases of consensual and referential knowledge in which this industry is managed; In addition the approaches that the Ecuadorian State proposes for the productive development are presented, in order to propose a path that allows Ecuadorian handicrafts to improve production, generate new products and innovate.

2. Artisanal production in Ecuador

In the General Regulation concerning the Law on the Defense of Ecuadorian Artisan, of the National Council for the Defense of the Artisan (JNDA 2010, 25), artisanal production is defined as: follows

Art. 2.- Artisanal activity is the manual action of transforming raw materials destined for the production of goods and services with the help of machines in the form of equipment or tools; that is to say,

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manual activity predominates over mechanical involvement in the productive process.

Art. 3.- *The Artisan* is a manual worker who runs a workshop or is a self-employed craftsman who, having been duly qualified by the National Council for the Defense of the Artisan and registered with the Ministry of Work and Human Resources, undertakes his or her work personally and has invested in their workshop or place of work in implements, machinery and raw materials for an amount that does not exceed 25% of the capital established for small industries.

The Ecuadorian definition is consistent with others found in Latin America and Europe; all of which are based on the definition proposed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1997, 6), which defines artisanal products as:

those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.

This definition must be used as a reference that completes or details the characteristics proposed by the different countries.

Equally, Article 8 of the General Regulation of the Law on the Defense of the Ecuadorian Artisan (JNDA, 2010, 26) defines the space where artisanal activity is carried out as follows:

Art. 8.- The artisanal workshop is the establishment in which the artisan habitually carries out his or her profession, art, trade or service.

Other requirements are also established, such as the fact that the activity should be eminently artisanal, the number of workers should not be greater than 15 and 5 for apprentices, capital invested in the business should be governed by current law, civil responsibility for the business should lie with the master craftsman of the workshop and that the workshop should be duly approved by the JNDA.

Artisanal workshops in Ecuador are considered to be SMEs and microfirms; a context that establishes limits and characteristics that take into account a common market with regard to productive capacity and the level of development of the sector.

The Ecuadorian State has carried out some actions in favor of the artisan sectors like the support for mobilization of national representations in the exterior¹ and the catalog of Handicrafts of Ecuador², the Cultural Revolution Policies by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage of Ecuador (MCP) (2011: 6) and the University of the Arts³. From the microenterprise perspective, Ecuador maintains support actions such as tariff protection, programs to support productive improvement, quality of resources and credit for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MCPEC, 2012: 15); This translates into initiatives such as EmprendEcuador, CreEcuador and InnovaEcuador. From other areas not related to the crafts, but relevant for the CCI, the MCP maintains a Historic Archive⁴ and the Cinematography Council of Ecuador⁵.

3. Artisanal production in Latin America

Artisanal production in Latin America is homogenous in the sense

¹ <http://www.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/apoyo-para-movilizacion-de-representaciones-nacionales-en-el-exterior/>.

² <http://catalogovirtual.cidap.gob.ec/>.

³ <http://www.uartes.edu.ec/>.

⁴ <http://sistemas.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/wwwisis/>.

⁵ <http://www.cncine.gob.ec/homecncine.php?c=43>.

that it has maintained its presence in lower social sectors and has been relegated below large-scale economic and social government interests, but this situation is gradually changing according to UNCTAD (2010, 257):

In Latin America and the Caribbean, interest is growing but the majority of countries are still at the study phase rather than the action stage. In South America, the potential is huge but remains underutilized and the process is moving at a slower pace, with very few exceptions.

Also visible in the context described by Uribe (n.d.) is the use of the term *popular art* in relation to Latin American artisanal production, which is produced mainly in rural areas amongst the indigenous population.

A comparison between Latin American countries⁶ on definitions with regard to the environment surrounding artisanal production allows us to see the overall perspective and the important factors related to the sector:

The current definitions of artisans in Latin America (Table 1) highlight the practice of a trade that must be accompanied by a qualification certifying that person as an artisan and at the same time enabling them to belong to supporting productive organizations; another characteristic is mastery of the instruments and equipment needed for production that make apparent the need for specialized preparation in the specific area of the activity in hand, but without losing the mastery of the manual process; all of which is supported by the traditions and culture that combine with creativity to imprint their own identity on each piece of work.

When describing artisanal activity (Table 2), the various definitions focus on underlining their 'predominantly handcrafted work with the aid of equipment and tools'. They also highlight the cultural value that derives from the place where they are produced, the artistic/aesthetic value that allows artisans to create attractive products that are identifiable due to their singular characteristics, which can be authenticated.

Other coincident and relevant factors are: patrimonial of a region, creativity, creation, production, restoration or repair of objects, product other than industry or non-mass produced, economic and utilitarian activity; These factors focus on geographical areas, the talent of the craftsman and his work, so they help to characterize and delimit the artisan activity; The utilitarian factor is fundamental to discriminate between decorative objects, souvenirs or functional objects.

Less common, or less widely cited, they refer to the family as a productive unit and to the interest in preserving processes and the raw materials used by ancestors in each region, thereby specifically delineating the activity.

From the wide ranging and sometimes inconsistent ideas among the definitions of artisanal units (Table 3), factors that differentiate them from other enterprises are: a physical space that can also be a person's home to carry out the activity or trade, the person in charge of managing or administering the activity must be an artisan, the workshop must be comprised of a person or small group that produces individualized objects. It should be noted that the definition in Mexico is generic for all types of microenterprises unlike other countries included in the comparison.

It is clear that the Latin American situation presents an environment

⁶ The choice of countries included for this comparison is based on the study State of the art in the artisanal production sector in Latin America (Estado del Arte del Sector Artesanal en Latinoamérica) (Uribe n.d.) carried out by the Iberoamerican Network of Innovation and Technology Transfer to drive Artisanal Production: the document examines the environment and situation where Latin American craftsmanship is being developed. Countries that do not form a part of the study have been included here due to their importance or influence. In the case of Peru, they were taken into account due to the proximity and cultural links with Ecuador; in the case of Brazil, they were taken into account due to their influence on the region and because they are a part of the emerging nations with a potential for cultural explosion (Cunningham, Banks, and Potts, 2008, 21).

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