Innovation, culture and crafts, a triad for the development of handicraft companies in San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca

Innovación, cultura y artesanías, trinomio para el desarrollo de las empresas artesanas de San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca

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Abstract

Innovation is a business tool that promotes the growth and development of business models; some artisan companies resist applying it to maintain and preserve their culture without altering products with a high sense of community identity. Globalization, new technologies, competitiveness and market saturation are environmental factors that affect the development of artisan companies, given this, innovation can be an opportunity for them. This article aims to develop a comparative analysis of the results provided by the application of innovation in the artisan companies of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico, as well as to determine the levels of the variable that these companies have in the community, the The methodology used for the study is mixed using techniques such as observation, interviews and application of questionnaires.

Innovation, culture and crafts, a triad for the development of			
handicraft companies in San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca.			
Objective	Methodology	Contributions	
Compare the	Mixed approach to	The study	
application and	non-experimental	determines the	
benefits of	descriptive-	benefits of applying	
innovation in	comparative	innovation in the	
artisan companies	research.	craft sector and	
in San Antonino		some of its forms of	
Castillo Velasco,		manifestation in the	
Oaxaca.		same.	

Innovation, Cultural identity, Handicrafts

Resumen

La innovación es una herramienta empresarial que propicia el crecimiento y desarrollo de los modelos de negocio, algunas empresas artesanas se resisten a aplicarla por mantener y preservar su cultura sin alterar productos con alto sentido de identidad comunitaria. La globalización, las nuevas tecnologías, la competitividad y la saturación de mercados son factores del entorno que inciden en el desarrollo de las empresas artesanas, ante esto la innovación puede resultar una oportunidad para ellas. Este artículo tiene por objetivo desarrollar un análisis comparativo de los resultados que provee la aplicación de la innovación en las empresas artesanas de San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, México, así como determinar los niveles de la variable que tienen dichas empresas en la comunidad, la metodología utilizada para el estudio es mixta utilizando técnicas como observación, entrevistas y aplicación de cuestionarios.

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Objetivo	Metodología	Contribuciones	
Comparar la	Enfoque mixto de	El estudio determina	
aplicación y	investigación de	los beneficios de la	
beneficios de la	carácter descriptiva-	aplicación de la	
innovación en las	comparativa no	innovación en el	
empresas artesanas	experimental.	sector artesanal y	
de San Antonino		algunas de sus	
Castillo Velasco,		formas de	
Oaxaca.		manifestación en el	
		mismo.	

Innovación, Identidad cultural, Artesanías

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Peer review under the responsibility of the Scientific Committee [https://www.marvid.org/]- in the contribution to the scientific, technological and innovation **Peer Review Process** through the training of Human Resources for the continuity in the Critical Analysis of International Research.



Introduction

Handicrafts represent an opportunity both for the cultural promotion of the communities and for family income in the same, this makes them products with cultural and social characteristics without leaving aside their economic value in the markets.

The historical origin of these products is certainly unknown, but it can be affirmed that it is one of the oldest trades; handmade pieces have been found from prehistoric times; however, it was in the Renaissance era when artisans were recognized in their own way in towns and cities (López, 2019).

The evolution of handicraft activity has been constant over time and in a globalized era with the unification of markets and with extensive means of communication, it has become a sector that is highly valued and desired mainly by tourism.

communities The see crafts instruments of their own resources, history and beliefs, giving them a cultural value, without losing sight of the fact that some artisans business opportunities identify in commercialization, adapting their products to the needs and requests of potential clients.

This is how two types of crafts emerge:

- Traditional crafts: produced since ancestral times, the result of history and beliefs. conservative, with remarkable variation in techniques and designs that identify the place of origin of the product.
- Contemporary craftsmanship: which retains much of the elaboration process, but open to modifications to meet new expectations and both material and spiritual needs of customers (Rivas, 2018).

The presence of these two types of craft products in the communities can lead to conflicts between producers, forming two groups, one of those who seek to preserve their culture without altering the crafts in any way, and the other group formed by those who wish to innovate both their products and processes to meet current needs and requests without losing the focus of their identity.

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These differences in the valuation and conception of handicrafts can have repercussions on what affects business models in terms of profitability, positioning or other variables linked to innovation processes.

This is why this study focuses on the business results of both those producers who see innovation as an opportunity and those who present resistance to change and updating due to their ideology of preservation.

In addition, it seeks to glimpse the degrees of applied innovation and its importance in the handicraft sector of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca.

Cultural and economic dimension of **handicrafts**

When talking about handicrafts, various concepts are linked, which have been analyzed different perspectives and which inevitably maintain a relationship with them; one of these concepts is culture and identity.

Handicrafts have a high cultural value, they are unique pieces, even if they are produced in large quantities, they impregnated with the creativity and imagination of those who make them. They arose from the human need for utensils for life and allow people to differentiate themselves from each other by the techniques, instruments and tools used in daily activities, such as handicrafts (Rivas, 2018).

The handicraft sector in the world plays an important role in the promotion and preservation of cultural diversity; through handicrafts, millenary cultural expressions are materialised and the collective identity of peoples is built (Sandoval and Garcia, 2013).

The diversification of crafts arises from different and multiple conditions: the materials used (precious metals, clay, fabric, thread, techniques used wood...), the elaboration, the beliefs and histories of a community, but, above all, it arises from the great human diversity, since each artisan is unique in the world and, even if they are part of a community, they have their own personality, their own creative thinking and their own unique style.

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With crafts, people construct systems of symbols linked to their belief systems and values to share with the world their belonging to an environment and their identity (Gómez and Hurtado, 2020).

Artisans feel a sense of belonging to their community by belonging to a sector that produces products from their place of origin, which reinforces their sense of identity.

In order to preserve and conserve handicrafts, the transmission of traditional knowledge from generation to generation is necessary, and this activity is key to avoid losing this art in the communities (López, 2019).

These products are representations of the culture and history of the communities and also form part of an economic activity that provides income for families; handicrafts generate jobs, improve income, increase the production of goods and transmit the cultural roots of the communities (Jaramillo and Armas, 2021).

In places where the cultural heritage is extensive due to the large number of customs, traditions, beliefs and many other elements, handicrafts represent a product not only of identity, but also of history, where the culture of a community is reflected and shared. However, many of these communities are rural and where alarming indices such as poverty and backwardness prevail, and it is there when these products become a source of income for families and for local economic growth, consolidating family businesses.

Such enterprises in artisanal contexts not only seek to achieve financial goals and objectives, but also to enhance social and cultural capital, which in turn builds pillars of stability and innovation (Liguori, Muldoon, Ogundana, Lee, & Wilson, 2024).

In order to meet their primary needs, artisan families make their products and market them through different means, managing this commercial activity in the form of a business unit that allows them to earn an economic livelihood and contribute to the development of their community.

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Innovation and craft innovation

Innovation has been and continues to be a key business tool for adapting to the constant changes in the environment and helps companies to keep up in an increasingly competitive market.

This tool is deeply involved with history due to its constant evolution within economic practices, contexts and organizational technological sometimes generated by advances, economic changes or business initiatives (Oki, 2024).

Innovation becomes a daily task, it is a and dynamic process which determines the survival or disappearance of a company, it is through it that business competitive advantages and real benefits for different stakeholders and for the environment are detonated (Canizales, 2020).

Companies arise from the search for the satisfaction of user needs through the supply of products or services, however, these needs linked to expectations are constantly updating and changing, which can be met through innovative processes.

Innovating requires integrating a series of tangible and intangible resources such as knowledge, technology, the human factor and any other type of element that promotes the development of added value to a product or service (García, Tumbajulca, and Cruz, 2021).

Although innovation is a latent need in companies, it is not so easy to implement or execute if the necessary resources are lacking to put it into practice.

Applied innovation provides new and successful solutions to problems, improvements in effectiveness and profitability, capitalisation of knowledge, development of competitive advantages, empowerment of creative and strategic thinking (Hernández, Domínguez and Caballero, 2007).

This business tool helps in the daily actions of companies by providing creative and unique solutions to the barriers and obstacles that arise for business development.

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In the handicraft sector, innovation has been integrated in organizational, technical and aesthetic forms in order to achieve a positioning in the markets of artisans as competitive subjects, especially in the last two decades, producers have diversified their products with notable improvements for the final presentation to consumers (Lugo, Ramírez, Navarro, and Estrella, 2008).

The increase in both supply and demand for handicrafts has prompted producers to seek new strategies to stand out in the market, one of the most important and transcendental of which product diversification. has innovation, artisans obtain benefits such as redesigning their products. improving distribution channels, local, national or even international positioning (Vásquez, Lucas, and Rodríguez, 2022). There are multiple benefits artisans obtain from can implementation and start-up of innovation in their economic activity, the most notorious of which has been product innovation with which crafts have evolved in their forms of presentation, designs or even diversity of new product lines.

Unit of analysis

San Antonino Castillo Velasco is an Oaxacan municipality belonging to the Valles Centrales region, part of the Ocotlán district, located thirty-five kilometres from the capital city of Oaxaca de Juárez (Honorable Ayuntamiento Constitucional de San Antonino Castillo Velasco [HACSACV], 2022). See figure below

Box 1



Figure 1

Macro location of the municipality of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Source: Adapted from Plan Municipal de Desarrollo Sostenible de San Antonino Castillo Velasco 2022-2024

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The municipality is a community with approximately six thousand inhabitants. Its main economic activities include the sale of handicrafts, the cultivation of roses and work with reeds (Castañeda de la Cueva, 2018).

The cultural heritage of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca is composed of:

- Original textile crafts outstanding for their embroidery techniques passed down from generation to generation with international recognition and whose garments can take up to six months of work or more depending on the complexity of the item.
- Gastronomy based on and recognised mainly for the yellow chicken, pork or beef empanadas, made with firewood on a clay comal accompanied by lettuce and onion with lemon and chilli.
- Traditions and festivities where music and dances are elements of community enhancement, among the main festivities are: the fifth Friday of Lent, Palm Sunday, Mondays on the hill, Day of the Dead festivities, sacadas and fandango and the traditional mayordomías (HACSACV, 2022).

According to the 2020 Population and Housing Census of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 71.9% of the municipal population is employed or has an independent economic activity (HACSACV, 2022). According to INEGI's 2019 National Statistical Directory of Economic Units, 452 commercial establishments were identified in San Antonino Castillo Velasco with 106 different economic activities, of which fifteen are dedicated to the activity of tailoring, embroidery and weaving of textile products, representing 3.31 % of the total (HACSACV, 2022).

However, according to the census carried out by the Artisans Committee of the municipality, there are approximately 160 textile artisans and around 30 workshops. For many years, mainly the women of the community have promoted for generations the art of a unique style of embroidery in the state, producing mainly blouses that are currently internationally recognised, this being their typical product that gives them identity (HACSACV, 2022).

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The artisan activity of San Antonino Castillo Velasco has led the Secretary of Tourism of the Government of the State of Oaxaca to consider the municipality part of the "Magic Route of Handicrafts", recognised for its embroidery and one of the most distinguished regional costumes in Oaxaca (HACSACV, 2022).

Method

The approach of this research is mixed, using the qualitative techniques of participant observation and unstructured interviews with craftswomen from the community, a comparative process was developed between two artisan enterprises, one that promotes innovation and the other that presents resistance due to the ideology of preserving its culture and identity intact.

On the other hand, the quantitative research developed from questionnaires allows us to identify the degree of innovation applied in the community's artisan enterprises.

The research is descriptive-comparative in nature as it seeks to determine the levels of innovation in the artisan enterprises of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico, and to show the comparison between those that implement it and those that do not.

It is a non-experimental study, observing reality in its own context without manipulating the categories of the study in any way, and it has a cross-sectional design as the data collection was carried out at a specific moment in time.

In order to take a representative sample of the artisan enterprises in the community, the simple random probability sampling method was used. This type of sampling consists of drawing a significant number of individuals at random from a population, calculated using statistical formulas. In the case of small populations, this type of sampling is often difficult to carry out efficiently (Casal and Once the mathematical 2003). procedure was carried out, the result of the sample size was obtained, which is: 39 artisan enterprises, which means that the questionnaires were applied to this result in order to give a reliability of 95% on the population size.

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Results

The artisan enterprises of the municipality offer a great diversity of blouses, dresses and now other types of garments such as shirts of different shapes and colours with embroideries originating in the community, these products carry within themselves history and a part of the life of the hands that create them, that is to say, of the artisans, some products due to their complexity take months to produce, making use of their own techniques shared throughout history for the creation of the embroideries and always trying to make unique and exclusive pieces for the clients who are mainly national and international tourists.

The emblematic and typical handicraft of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca is a blouse embroidered with the five original techniques. See Figure 2.

Box 2



Figure 2

Typical embroidered blouse from San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca.

Source: Adapted from Plan Municipal de Desarrollo Sostenible de San Antonino Castillo Velasco 2022-2024. HACSACV, 2022, p.115

This section of results is subdivided into two stages of the study: the first focused on a comparative analysis of two artisan enterprises with a great difference in the applicability of innovation, and the second, a statistical analysis to describe the dimensional levels of innovation as reflected in the practices and importance given by the artisans.

For the comparative analysis, the following artisan enterprises were taken as a reference:

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Aguja de plata: artisan enterprise that is a pioneer in the innovation of artisan products in the community, aiming to innovate two fully authentic products per year.

El Águila Real: a traditional artisan company that only produces and markets the typical crafts of the community.

The differences between the two artisan companies are significant from the observation of the points of sale they have and the results they have obtained from their management practices and implementation of innovation.

"Aguja de plata" has a signposted establishment where, through shelves, it presents and displays the large number of products it has for sale, it has a wide range of diversity not only in terms of different products, but also in terms of the immense diversity of designs, the owner shared with us that her company has exported to different parts of the world, to Europe, the United States and even Japan. They have adapted the colours of their garments according to the preferences of some countries, for example, Germany where shades of black and grey are in great demand, quite the opposite of the typical blouse which is white with multicoloured embroidery. See Figure 3 and 4.

Box 3



Figure 3

Embroidered earrings from San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Source: Aguja de Plata (2024)

ISSN: 2444-5010 RENIECYT-CONAHCYT: 1702902 ECORFAN® All rights reserved. Despite having a large stock of products, in an interview it was shared that the products are in short supply due to the high demand for them, either through the point of sale or through social networks or national or international shipments. In addition, this company has sought to place its products in mass events such as exhibitions or craft fairs, not only in the state but also internationally, where they show and exhibit their innovative products, arguing that sometimes the number of pieces they place in these events is insufficient due to the high demand they have.

This artisan company has been a reference and example for others that have emerged in the community, based on the collaborative work that has been developed between the owner and other artisans, and is one of the most important at a local level due to the results and growth that it has maintained over time.

The innovation present in "Aguja de Plata" is manifested in the products, processes, work models, marketing strategies and other elements.

Box 4



Figure 4

Embroidered blouse from San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico with black and grey shades

Source: Aguja de Plata (2023)
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On the other hand, the company "El Águila Real" does not have a physical point of sale, its production and sales are carried out in the home of the owner family, which is not adequate for what is required for an attractive point of sale, it does not have a stock of products as it practically produces on customer orders and only offers the blouse and the traditional dress of the community, it has only managed to offer diversity in terms of the colours used for the design of the garments but without losing the essence of the handicrafts.

It does not constantly employ the use of social networks or other digital media to disseminate, promote and market its products, nor does it participate in mass sales events such as fairs or exhibitions, all of which is reflected in a low level of sales and positioning with respect to other artisan enterprises in the community. See Figure 5.

Box 5



Figure 5

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Embroidered blouse from San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, Mexico by company "El Águila Real"

Source: El Águila Real (2021)

Directly, the results obtained by the two companies analysed in the comparative exercise are reflected mainly in their profitability, productivity, positioning and competitiveness, in which there are large variations between them.

With regard to the quantitative results of the research, it is important to consider that innovation is a multifactorial variable, and to measure it in this study the following dimensions were used: product innovation, product diversity and innovation culture.

Once the questionnaires had been applied to the corresponding sample of this study, the descriptive statistical analysis of the dimensions selected to measure innovation in artisan enterprises was carried out and the results were plotted as follows. See the following graphs.

Box 6



Figure 6

Graph of product innovation

Note: Own elaboration with data collected from the surveys applied

In San Antonino Castillo Velasco, artisans identify the current needs of increasingly demanding customers, which is reflected in the fact that almost all artisan companies implement innovation processes by diversifying their product lines to offer to their customers, however, there is still a segment that resists implementing innovative processes.

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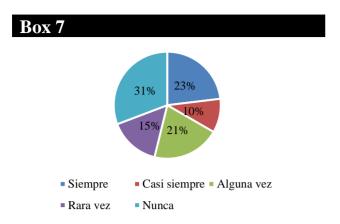


Figure 7

Graph of product diversity

Note: Own elaboration with data collected from the surveys applied

The artisan companies are transcending not only the sale of the blouse and the typical local dress, but also diversifying the textiles in terms of designs and colours, but also expanding the product portfolio by using and embedding the emblematic embroidery of the community in wallets, key rings, accessories, bows, tablecloths, furniture, shoes, belts, ties, or any other product that the client demands.

In the case of Aguja de Plata, the company's goal is to innovate two totally original and novel products every year, which they present at an important event during the year. There are very few artisan companies that resist product innovation and continue to promote only the blouse with the typical style of the community.



Figure 8

Innovation culture graph

Note: Own elaboration with data collected from the surveys applied

The culture of innovation turns out to be a gradual process in the artisan enterprises of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, according to the identification of needs and competition, they seek to maintain and preserve innovation as an element of growth and positioning in the markets.

Innovation is in a gradual process of application in the artisan enterprises of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca. The instrument applied verifies that this tool is not unknown to the artisans and that to a large extent they recognise its importance in order to maximise their benefits and results.

Conclusions

Innovation represents a tool for growth and development for artisan enterprises, and has an impact on their profitability through increased sales, not only through product diversification, but also through the implementation of new and improved marketing processes or the use of diverse and innovative sales media, both digital and physical.

Resistance to change is always a difficulty for business growth and the artisans of San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Oaxaca, who only offer the typical products of their handicraft sector, are victims of the consequences.

Innovation is a variable directly linked competitiveness, the former promotes added value and advantages over competitors, and also encourages producers to be and remain constantly updated with respect to trends and needs.

From an analytical point of view, innovating the product does not lead to a loss of cultural identity, but to an adaptation to the only constant, which is change.

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Companies such as Aguja de Plata that seek to sustain continuous innovation with the constant diversification and launch of new products have not infringed on the essence of the handicraft itself, since these products continue to be made by hand, without technological equipment that promotes mass production, in addition, each handicraft produced and sold has unique elements that make them unique pieces, emphasising that the embroidery of the diversity of products offered are made with the ancestral techniques of the community. Crafts are a product with economic value, but also social and cultural value, the latter depends not only on the design of the product, but also on the whole process, techniques, history and knowledge of the artisan who makes it.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the article reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution

Pablo-Calderón, Karla de los Ángeles: Contributed to the project idea and desk research.

Castillo-Leal, Maricela: Contributed to the research method and technique.

Cruz-Cabrera, Blasa Celerina: Contributed to the analysis of information for the description of results.

Cruz-García, Leobardo Daniel: Contributed to the development of the fieldwork and the production of graphs of the results.

Availability of data and materials

The data were obtained from documentary research in databases and freely accessible academic repositories and also through fieldwork with the application of research techniques.

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Abbreviations

HACSACV Honorable Ayuntamiento Constitucional de San Antonino Castillo Velasco (Constitutional City Council of San Antonino Castillo Velasco)

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Discussions

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