

Sustainable Innovation 2023

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Business School for the Creative Industries

University for the Creative Arts

Epsom, Surrey, UK

Textile Craftsmanship, Cooperative Movement and Social Transformation: Tinku Kamayu Case.

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Textiles are agents of collective, gestural, and symbolic expression (Hughes, 1996) and, they can be perceived as a language that weaves notions and concepts (Cutuli, 2008). Besides, craftsmanship is a social construct that represents the cultural heritage of every region. Its expression, communication, and trade require specific channels and cultural protection for both these products artisans and consumers within the global context. Handicrafts are the recognition and respect for one's own local characteristics and typical products that show and keep alive the culture of every region worldwide (Gardetti, 2015).

Rapid modernisation, tourism, and globalisation have altered the ways in which artisans create, consume and trade traditional ritual clothes and ethnic dress (Root, 2005). Various researches such as Popelka and Littrell (1991) and Swain (1993) have discovered that such alteration erodes traditional cultures. Notwithstanding that, most artisan groups –including aboriginal artisans- wish to preserve the deeply rooted local values as well as their beliefs in their social and environmental relations.

Artisan cooperatives are part of a more extended social and political activism, including groups that fight against poverty, women groups, environmental groups, and groups against child labour –all of which promote change. Artisan groups have varied organisational structures from formally registered cooperative associations to less organised family and neighbour associations. But far and beyond formality, all of them have the same objectives: to ensure a good income, to support members –including emotional containment, to provide safe working conditions, to purchase raw materials, and to have market access.

Cooperative association Tinku Kamayu, which in Quechua language means “joined to work,” is located in Santa María, Province of Catamarca, Argentina. Tinku Kamayu was organised under Margarita Ramirez' initiative, whose great-grandfather was a Chieftain during 2001 socioeconomic crisis –the worst crisis ever recorded in the country. It was then that Margarita witnessed different types of poverty. She was mainly moved by a group of women that had many problems to leave their homes as they needed to become invisible because otherwise they would be considered as “bad women.”

Using textile craftsmanship and their ancestors' transmitted knowledge –sheep, *llama* and *vicuna* wool spinning, natural dyes, handloom weaving, and making clothes, carpets and other accessories- Tinku Kamayu managed to empower and socially transformed these women. Some testimonials from the cooperative members were:

“Here I've felt respected as a woman.”

“I could be contained.”

“I've felt fulfilled as the woman, mother or wife that I'm now.”

“We felt thrilled to transmit our culture through a thread.”

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This paper will mainly discuss how the textile craftsmanship and cooperative movement were tools for the social transformation of Tinku Kamayu's women. First, there is an introduction of Santa María patriarchal culture, followed by Tinku Kamayu's story. Then follows Margarita Ramírez' profile (her characteristics and vision of colonialism), the organisation of the first women team, their work and transformation from invisible to visible process. And finally, the paper presents some conclusions and lessons learned.