Case Study 40

An Indigenous Andean Textile Art[[1]](#footnote-1)

This case is illustrative of an ICH craft element in which women and men have specific and complementary roles. This traditional textile art is a traditional craft of the indigenous communities who live on an island located in Lake Titicaca on the Peruvian High Andean Plateau. This island was relatively isolated from the mainland until the 1950s and, as a consequence, the notion of community is very strong there. The strong sense of community is reflected in the way community life is organized and in the collective decision-making that the community practices. The textile art of this indigenous community is a weaving tradition that goes back to the pre-Columbian civilizations of the Inca people. It is a cultural fusion which keeps alive aspects of the cultures of pre-Hispanic Andean peoples mixed with the culture of the Spanish *conquistadores*. The textiles they create are knitted or woven on pre-Hispanic four-stake ground looms and are produced as an everyday activity by both men and women of all ages. The finished textiles are worn by all community members.

What is particularly notable about this textile production is that it embodies a clear distinction along gender lines both in the tools and techniques used and the nature of the garments produced. This differentiation not only expresses differences in gender roles with regard to the actual craft production but also in relation to their interaction with the influences of the European colonisers. As a result, only men use the pedal loom and needles with which they make garments which reflect a Spanish colonial influence, such as trousers and hats. In contrast, the plain loom is used only by women who make more traditional indigenous garments such as blankets. In this way, it is possible to interpret the gendered assignment of the different methods and types of craft production as reflecting the gender differences in the relationship of the local community’s men and women to the European incomers: These differences may be a reflection of the degree to which members of each sex had public contact with the colonisers as well as reflecting the relative positions of men and women in terms of social and political power. Another aspect of gender-based community attitudes and responses that is worth noting is responses to tourism in the area. These are also gendered such that the indigenous men dominate in the provision of tourism services while women have benefited from increased sales of textiles which has given them a new source of power in their homes and changed their lives in many ways. Interestingly, though, the women have not organized themselves into sales collectives, but a few have opened family-run, tourist-oriented shops.

1. . Daniel Escobar López (2012) ‘The Shifting Phases of a Commodity: Textiles and Ethnic Tourism on a Lake Titicaca Island,’ Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology, 20(1), Article 13. Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol20/iss1/13> and Elayne Zorn (2004) Weaving a Future: Tourism, Cloth, and Culture on an Andean Island at p. 158. Further information from Peru (2012) Periodic Report 00793/ Peru on the implementation of the Convention and on the status of elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, submitted by Peru to the Seventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO Headquarters, December 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)