CASE STUDY 17

Community control over tourism and trade associated with a weaving tradition in Peru

The case of Taquile weaving demonstrates possibilities for income generation from trade in handicraft products and tourism; it also shows that it is not easy to maintain community cohesion and to distribute profits equitably within the community when confronted with external pressures.

The island of Taquile is home to approximately 1,900 people and is roughly three hours by boat to the mainland. Weaving has been an everyday activity of men and women on the island for many generations. The weaving process and the textiles produced are defining characteristics of Taquilean culture. Taquilean textiles are worn by all community members, regardless of age or gender; they indicate characteristics of the wearer such as marital status or social position. While contemporary symbols and images are now also used in the textiles, the traditional manufacturing techniques and styles have been maintained. In 2005 UNESCO proclaimed Taquile and its Textile Art a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage. It was inscribed on the Representative List in 2008.

#### New markets for textiles

Until the 1950s, the islanders had led a relatively isolated existence and woven products were produced primarily for local use. In the late 1960s, Taquileans began to sell them to outsiders, first in nearby Cuzco and then internationally. Tourism to the island of Taquile became more important as a local source of income in the 1970s. Tourism and the sale of textiles have thus generated income for local people, but they have also led to internal stratification within a previously fairly egalitarian community and local control over these sources of income has diminished.

In 1968 a Peace Corps volunteer helped Taquileans to start selling their textiles at a store in Cuzco. When this store closed, Taquileans sought other markets for their goods, both in Cuzco and internationally. During the 1980s, they established a cooperative to manage two community stores selling locally woven products. By 1997, there were 270 Taquilean cooperative members, representing about three- quarters of the population. The cooperative shops set prices equitably, based on the quality of artisanship and the amount of labour, while retaining 5 per cent of the monies earned for cooperative maintenance. Private sales to tourists were prohibited, although they did occur in some cases.[[1]](#footnote-1) This method of managing income from craft sales is in keeping with islander traditions of equality and collective decision-making. But although tourism contributes to the viability of the textile tradition, escalating external demand has contributed to ‘significant changes in material, production and meaning’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

#### New tourist markets

Tourism has also become a source of significant income for Taquileans. Following the publication of a feature on Taquile in a popular travel guide book in 1976, tourism boomed on the island. Today it receives approximately 40,000 visitors a year. After establishing a sailboat cooperative, Taquileans gained a competitive advantage over mainland boat operators in the 1980s by acquiring a legal monopoly on control over docking sites on the island. When this monopoly right was removed in the 1990s, commercial tour agencies quickly took over the transport of tourists, made partnerships with individual Taquileans and introduced tour guides from outside the community. Some local people were exploited in the competitive market that ensued, while other members of the community (and outsiders) benefited, creating greater internal social stratification.[[3]](#footnote-3) Although Taquilean tour operators and tour guides still found employment, this undermined existing community-based decision-making structures, intended to ensure that tourism benefits were spread reasonably equally among Taquileans.

#### Retaining community control over the benefits generated by tourism and textile sales

Tourism and the sale of Taquile textiles have brought income and educational opportunities to Taquileans. This has reinforced pride in being Taquilean and raised awareness about Taquilean ICH more generally. It has helped to challenge the racism and discrimination often experienced by indigenous groups such as the Taquileans.[[4]](#footnote-4) New markets for Taquilean woven products have helped to sustain the traditional practice of weaving, although designs have also changed to respond to these new markets. Community-run cooperative enterprises have helped Taquileans retain control over the benefits generated by tourism and textile sales, although these cooperatives have not always withstood external competitive pressures. Where Taquileans have been unable to retain control over tourist transport and the sale of textile products, they have been unable to maximize community income or ensure equitable benefits to community members.

For further information:

* *Zorn, E. 2004.* Weaving a Future: Tourism, Cloth & Culture on an Andean Island*. Iowa City, University of Iowa Press.*
* *Zorn, E. and Ypeij, A. 2007. ‘Taquile: A Peruvian Tourist Island Struggling for Control’.* European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 82 (April), pp. 119–28:* http://www.cedla.uva.nl/50\_publications/pdf/revista/82RevistaEuropea/82-Ypeij&Zorn-ISSN-0924-0608.pdf
* Taquile weaving, inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List:

www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/00166

1. . Mitchell, R. and Eagles, P. 2001, ‘An Integrative Approach to Tourism: Lessons from the Andes of Peru’, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism,* Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 4–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Cheong, C. 2008, Sustainable Tourism and Indigenous Communities: *The Case of Amantaní and Taquile Islands,* University of Pennsylvania. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Mitchell, R. and Eagles, P. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . Cheong, C. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)