CASE STUDY 17

Intangible cultural heritage and inclusive economic development: textile art in Taquile (Peru)

The island of Taquile, situated on Lake Titicaca, is roughly three hours by boat to the mainland and is home to approximately 1,900 people. 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.

Until the 1950s, the islanders had led a relatively isolated existence and woven products were produced primarily for local use and to fulfill a social function. 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. In 1976, the publication of a report on Taquile in a widely used tourist guide gave a new boost to tourism.

The influx of tourists and the sale of textiles brought economic benefits to the people of the island. However, this change also led to internal stratification within a previously fairly egalitarian community and decreased community control over these two sources of income.

To help control this negative result, many cooperatives were created between 1980 and 1990; two cooperatives to administer the sale of woven products and a sailboat cooperative. Thus, two community stores were created. 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) By 1997, there were 270 Taquilean cooperative members, representing about three-quarters of the population.

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)

The sailboat cooperative gained a competitive advantage over mainland boat operators 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.

In conclusion, 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 of which they had been victims.[[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. Local management of cooperatives have helped Taquileans retain control over the revenue generated from 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)