

Changes in Transference of Craft Skills in Rural-to-Urban Migration in the Bolivian Altiplano

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigates how rural-to-urban migration affects the transference of traditional textile craft skills for female indigenous artisans in La Paz, Bolivia

Methodology: Extensive participatory research and in-depth interviews with textile artisans. Research was conducted with an artists' group in La Paz, Bolivia called Artesanía Sorata. The research process was not merely observational. As a part of data collection, the first author has also learned textile skills, such as spinning and weaving, from the artisans. Knowledge sharing was multidirectional from the artisans to the first author, and back again.

Findings: Rural-to-urban migration does not result in a complete loss of traditional skills, but rather a complex relationship between traditional hand crafts and technology. Upon arrival to the city, many textile artisans gain employment producing crafts for NGOs or craft businesses. They experience the professionalization of their preexisting skills, increase their knowledge and productivity through the use of knitting machines, and learn organizational and business skills. However, as Bolivian youth seek more professional work the communal context for the intergenerational skills transfer is significantly altered. Through rural-to-urban migration the traditional systems of textile knowledge acquisition, skills transfer, and dissemination have become more multifaceted and nuanced rather than destroyed.

Originality/Value: This research study reveals the many ways traditional artisanship is being reinterpreted and readapted for contemporary use. Artisans are not victims of globalization and respond to powerful global forces with agency and creativity.

Keywords: Craft, Bolivia, Textiles, Skill Transference, Migration

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