



Approach to the analysis of the crisis in the handicraft sector and its relationship with international migration to the United States of America¹

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the country's generalized economic crisis -with the exception of some sectors-, handicraft production has not escaped it. The causes may be diverse, although one of them can be attributed to the phenomenon of migration to the United States of America (USA). On the one hand, many of the artisans who know the craft have left for that destination. On the other hand, the natural heirs of this knowledge have already migrated or are about to do so, since this work is less successful than what can be done in that country. In addition, as far as marketing is concerned, and specifically within the national market, an important proportion of the majority of migrants are potential consumers of handicraft products. Moreover, as has been pointed out in other works, the influence of U.S. culture in the daily life of migrants and their families has resulted in the modification of customs and habits of the traditional culture and, consequently, the

substitution of handcrafted objects for those of industrial origin.

Initially, the idea was to carry out an investigation that would take into account all handicrafts and the entire national territory. However, it was limited to the area of Quetzaltenango and Totonicapán, on the one hand; and on the other, it was reduced to the textile sector of handicrafts and to some extent to ceramics. Nevertheless, some artisans in other branches such as furniture, hats and wool products were interviewed.

Fieldwork was conducted in the municipalities of Salcajá and Quetzaltenango (in the department of Quetzaltenango) and Totonicapán (department of Totonicapán). We basically used semi-open interviews with key informants: leaders of artisan organizations (cooperatives and associations). We also conducted a focus group session with several artisans from different branches, belonging to one of these organizations.

1. CURRENT CONTEXT OF PRODUCTION AND MARKETING OF HANDICRAFTS IN GUATEMALA

We shall begin by defining what we mean by handicrafts. To do so, we will use the definition given by the Inter-American Charter of Handicrafts and Folk Arts (cited by Sojos; 2002:74). It states that: "In its broadest sense (crafts) is the work done by hand; or with preeminence of manual labor when the machine intervenes. At the moment in which the machine prevails, it leaves the artisanal framework and enters the industrial sphere".



¹ This work was carried out in 2004 for the Programa de Migraciones de la Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales -FLACSO-, Guatemala headquarters which granted publication rights to the Centro de Estudios Folklóricos of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.

It is complemented by Rubín de la Borbolla when he says that popular crafts “are traditional utilitarian and anonymous cultural expressions, product of the division of labor, predominantly manual and the use of simple tools. Their manifestations take place in the economic, aesthetic, ritual and ludic fields”. (Quoted by Sojos; 2002:79).

1.1 ANALYSIS OF THE BEHAVIOR OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION

We will try to find some kind of classification of handicrafts, within the academic world, and we select two, although we know there are more. In the article “Ramas artesanales” (Camposeco, et. Al., 2002) the authors present one in which the criterion used is the material used for its elaboration and that seemed to us to be quite complete, which is the following: 1. *Clay, mud and sandy clay* (pottery, glazed pottery, majolica pottery, transitional pottery and glazed pottery); 2. *Fibers* (animal fibers - human hair, horse hair or mane, sheep wool and feathers-; vegetable fibers -palm leaves, maguey or henequen, tule, wicker, cibaque, bamboo, bejucos, tusa, cotton and cajete bark- and synthetic fibers. Within the group of vegetable fibers, three crafts will be derived: basketry, tusa and jarcia; 3. *Hides*; 4. *Fruit barks* (morro and jícaro; tecomates and gourds); 5. *Wood* (kitchen utensils; chests and boxes; miniature objects; wooden toys; canoes; imaginary masks, furniture; marquetry or inlay); 6. *Musical instruments*; 7. *Stone*; 8. *Fabric*; 9. *Popular toys*; 10. *Metal* (wrought iron, tin, copper, goldsmithing); 11. *Paper* (kites, flowers, piñatas, papier-mâché); 12. *Confectionery*; 13. *Ceramics*; 14. *Pyrotechnics*; 15. *Glass*.

García Canclini (2002; 99-100) proposes another classification, only that it is based on the types of consumption of the handmade product: “*the practical, within daily life* (tableware,

clothing); the *ceremonial*, linked to religious or festive activities (masks, pottery with sacred scenes); the *sumptuary*, which serves as a social distinction for sectors with high purchasing power (jewelry, carved furniture); and the *aesthetic or decorative*, destined to decorate, especially homes (amates, mobiles)” (Underlined in the original, the examples given by the author are for Mexican cases).

The interviewees used other criteria to classify handicrafts. They referred exclusively to the sector in which they operated and not with a global vision. The main criteria they used were: the use, the destination of the handicraft production, the adherence to tradition and the elaboration technique. In the first criterion, they spoke of decorative and utilitarian handicrafts. In the second, they referred to domestic consumption and export. As for the attachment to tradition, they divided them into traditional handicrafts (folk art) and modern ones. As mentioned above, apart from these, some of the interviewees gave other classifications, focused exclusively on the branch of handicrafts in which they work (ceramics and textiles).

a) *The process of elaboration of handicraft products*

The production process of the products has basic moments shared by the various handicrafts: i) obtaining or purchasing raw materials; ii) preparation of the raw materials; iii) production itself; and iv) finishing touches. Each type of handicraft has its variants, especially in terms of the preparation of the raw material. For example, in the case of textiles, this phase involves many more steps than in the case of other handicrafts (purchase of thread, winding,

warping, doubling, raking, tying, dyeing, untying, tying and binding).

However, there are some associations of cooperatives or NGO's² that are linked to the export of handicrafts that add other steps to the production process including market research, elaboration of new designs and planning.

b) Main problems faced in the production process

The interviewees identified various problems, according to their experience and that of the organizations they represent. These have to do with different aspects of the production process, such as raw materials, labor, financing, technology and work tools, organization of production, and updating the type of products for better insertion in both national and international markets.

Several of those interviewed pointed out that part of the problem starts at the beginning of the production process, i.e., with regard to raw materials. This includes quality, the difficulty in obtaining them, rising prices and the monopoly in distribution.

...first, it would be the monopoly that exists in Salcajá of raw materials. There are strong stages in which the producer has problems in the supply of yarn, and this occurs in the best moments in which the artisan requires it. This happens in November, December and January. Let's say that they are like the strongest months of production of the craftsman, and it is where the yarn is scarce... Within the framework of the same dyes that are used in the dyeing of the yarn, the problem is that some of them fade, but

*it is because of the quality that sometimes the dyers use to dye the yarn. And that's another big difficulty that the production process has.*³

*On the issue with yarn... how they impose prices. But there we go, no one can say "well why did the price go up?" No one can counter the rise of the yarn. You raise the yarn and pay me and that's it. It's not like saying a product "look this went up"; "well, let's protest". On this side there is no such thing, because everyone buys their raw material and since it is quite a lot, it is not only one or two but a large amount and then there is the problem. Now we handle another type of work, no longer fabrics, but hammocks. They are always typical hammocks. But really, the problem was the preparation of the dyes, the dyeing. These are not of the same quality and that has always been the problem, but since the dyes are not made here but imported, this is another problem.*⁴

As for workforce, interviewees report a shortage. This has various causes. Young people and artisans in general no longer continue with the trade because they are looking for other options.



² Among the former, the Federación de Cooperativas de Producción Artesanal, ARTEXCO R.L. of the city of Quetzaltenango; and among the latter, the Comercializadora Tesoros Mayas S.A. (foundation) and the Asociación para la promoción de comercio equitativo de Centroamérica, México y el Caribe-CRECER-¹ for example.

³ A.I., director of the Tzukim Pop Movement of Quetzaltenango. Note: Only the initials of the names of the interviewees will be used to protect their identity.

⁴ L., Ch., director of the Integral Cooperative of Artisanal Production Chuimequena R.L. of Totonicapán.

The main problem faced by the ceramic artisan is that the whole process is done by one person at home, in his or her workshop, because there is no longer a labor force dedicated to this trade. There are many reasons why young people, mainly the children of artisans, are no longer interested in art. Because I suppose they have realized how hard it is to carry out the whole process... some have dedicated themselves to study, they are professionals; others have thrown themselves into the informal economy; others have emigrated to the North (USA); and all of them have taken different directions.⁵

The problem is that young people do not want to work now because wages are very low. So that is the problem. They want to earn, and we all really have to be aware that we cannot increase the price of our product because China is dragging us down.⁶

Here we can highlight several things. On one hand, it is clear that, given the critical situation of the country's economy, artisan activity does not represent a viable option for the new generations, who, in general, seek more successful subsistence strategies: professional activities, informal economy, migration. This puts the future of this activity at risk, since it is breaking, in a way, the chain that represented the inheritance of the craft, whose learning was transmitted from generation to generation.

However, for one of the interviewees, the outlook for handicrafts is not so bleak and he believes that despite the above, the practice will not necessarily disappear:

It could be that this is broken from one generation to the next. That is very likely,

but there are young people who do not come from a family of weavers, and the young person says, "I want to start weaving", and begins to weave without being a weaver and then starts. Either because they say, "I need work" or there are peasants who say, "I prefer to leave the field, I prefer to work in weaving" and then that is maintained. And I feel that it is not a large number, because we are not going to say that it is a large number, but they do change jobs. So, they leave the field and go to the actual weaving.⁷

Skarwan (1998: 54) refers to this for the case of ceramics in Totonicapán, when he states that "for young people, ceramics is not very attractive, because of the very hard physical work, the not very valued image of the ceramist, and the very low remuneration. The raw material, on the other hand, is very expensive and the whole process of making ceramics is very long". However, he is optimistic when he goes on to say that "The number of potters is gradually decreasing, but they are not going to disappear because they are culturally well rooted in Totonicapán".

Another problem pointed out by the interviewees has to do with the financing of the activity. First, artisans do not have sufficient capital to invest. This means that artisans are often at the expense of traders who distribute certain raw materials and, at the same time, buy their products from them.



⁵ E.S., ceramic artisan, director of the Totonicapán Ceramic Cooperative, Totonicapán, Totonicapán.

⁶ Artisan participant in the focus group, Quetzaltenango. He refers to the great competition in the international market that the People's Republic of China represents by offering handmade products at very low prices.

⁷ L. Ch., Totonicapán.

*Another problem, I would say, is a function of capital. Because most of the artisans always manage the issue of credit with the stores in Salcajá. In other words, the store gives him, as credit, the inputs. Then he (the artisan) returns to the store and gives the cut as a sale, and in the end, it is the economic management that they (the merchants) have in this process. So, I would say, one, the monopoly of the raw material; and the other, the management of the capital, specifically in the production”.*⁸

On the other hand, like other workers in other productive sectors (cf. Molina Loza, 2004:8), they do not have access to credit.

*There are people of goodwill who want to help but who are not professionals doing what they do. So interest rates are not calculated at technical levels, but at whimsical levels, which are good-hearted, and we are now experiencing the effects of this lack of professionals in the intention of development. For the sources of financing of the artisan sector in Latin America, the typology of credit is the same, this is repeated in Latin America.*⁹

The lack of technification was also mentioned as a problem, on the one hand, and on the other, the fact that the artisans have very old equipment. Competition for markets requires that products be of increasingly better quality and better finished. This is made difficult by the use of obsolete technologies, together with the use of working tools that are in poor condition or very worn out.

The interviewees also reported a lack of work organization. Craft activity, as a traditional activity, has certain rhythms, times and

deadlines, different from those demanded by the market, especially the international market. Artisans are not tied to rigid schedules. This makes it very difficult to plan production, especially to meet the demands of the market.

*I believe that if an effort is made to market Guatemalan handicrafts, the first thing we have to do is to increase associationism, because people are very dispersed. So, it is very difficult to plan production. Then, there are deep-rooted customs in our artisans, of not having time, that is to say, to get into a role. That is to say that we are going to work two hours a day, but well worked. So, the main problem is the disorganization of the people and that the artisan is not used to working on a schedule. When you as a consultant start working with artisans, you tell them “Look Juan, how long does it take you to work on this tablecloth? you see, it costs a lot”. But, if you investigate how many days and how many hours it takes, it is very difficult to educate people to make a schedule. And to be able to plan the delivery times of the products, I say that it is, more than anything, the lack of habit of working in an organized way. And wanting to set up an artisanal production center is very difficult. It has been tried and it doesn't work. People are used to working on the ranch, in their village. And people are not used to being supervised. I feel that the biggest problem is not having the artisan's time.*¹⁰



⁸ A.I

⁹ Artisan's opinion during the development of the focus group.

¹⁰ J.A., leader of ARTEXCO R.L., Quetzaltenango.

Another problem, in addition to the previous one, is the lack of adaptation of the artisans to the new fashions presented by the market and they are reluctant to appropriate new designs. In addition to this, there are no marketers and marketing specialists linked to the sector who are in charge of researching and proposing products that can be better placed in the market. At this point we would like to reflect on the position of some researchers of traditional popular culture, regarding the danger of the loss of identity of the peoples facing the globalized world. For example, García Escobar (2002:262)¹¹ argues that “One of these identities is made up of our popular crafts. As we already know, handicrafts are the secular result of the anonymous production of artists of the people who constantly inherited this knowledge to the following generations of artisans of today, *which are threatened by an economic process, for the sake of a profit based on exportation to larger companies and consumers in economically better developed countries* (the emphasis is ours)”. We share this concern. We agree on the importance of preserving identity for the people. However, it is necessary to see the other side of the coin. The conditions in which artisans live and the enormous economic needs they face are, in general, critical. For this reason, the statements of one of the interviewees - a promoter of handicraft exports - contrast when he states that “... (one of) the most serious problems that handicrafts have is commercialization and I see that the problem of production is that people are reluctant to make new designs. They want to do what they have been used to doing for a long time. So it is a process of making change, there is very little workforce that wants to change the design, *with anthropologists there is a problem: (they say) that we are promoting the loss of craftsmanship. The technique is followed, what we have to do is*

to adapt the artisan's knowledge to new products that the market is demanding (the emphasis is ours)”.¹² He, within his logic, is more concerned with helping artisans in their economic situation than with preserving ancestral designs. But, as Deleon Meléndez (op. cit. 269) concludes, “The arts and popular crafts are in a dilemma: adapt to change or continue within a scheme of traditionality. It is up to you, artisans and craft experts, to make the most convenient decision”.

To face all these problems, artisans and their organizations have been able to do very little, although there is some awareness of the changes that need to be made: technological innovation, improvement of instruments, cooperatives getting cheaper raw materials, among others. Efforts have been made to raise awareness among artisans to improve their quality, accept new designs and make new products. The associations are trying to gain the confidence of the artisans and pay them fair prices.

1.1 ANALYSIS OF MARKET BEHAVIOR

The handicrafts market can be divided, in the first instance, into national and international. Depending on the type of handicraft and the organization to which the artisan belongs, this is the market to which the artisan directs his/her products.

There are those who, despite belonging to a cooperative or association, sell the product on their own. In this case, they do so at the national level and generally to intermediaries, who then pass it on to the final consumer. This is one of the reason why the artisan is not associated with any organization.



¹¹ See also Deleon Meléndez (2002) and Esquivel Vásquez (2002).

¹² J.A. Quetzaltenango.

Regarding the production destined for the domestic market, most of it is for local consumption and a small part for tourism, in localized areas such as Chichicastenango, Atitlán, Quetzaltenango, Antigua Guatemala and the capital city.

Many of Totonicapán's artisan weavers are dedicated to producing *cortes*¹³. These are aimed at women, who are the final consumers. However, they do not buy directly from the weavers. They sell them in Salcajá, where about 10 families have a monopoly on their trade. From here they are distributed throughout the country.

The international market can only be accessed by artisans who are members of a cooperative or association, or who are contacted by a private company that exports handicrafts.

According to those interviewed, the best years for exports were between 1990 and 1993, which coincided with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America and the beginning of the indigenous peoples' decade. Several solidarity organizations, especially from the United States, promoted imports of Guatemalan handicrafts. However, it was in 1994 that exports began to decline and since then they have not fully recovered. Skarwan (1998:23) explains that "due to the low quality of the fabrics since 1994 and the saturation of foreign markets, the weaving of fabrics decreased again, so weavers have returned to the production of *cortes*".

Among the efforts to regain some space in the international market is ARTEXCOR.L. It is an association that has worked hard on the quality of the products it exports. Among other things, it set up an ISO 9000-certified yarn factory, which guarantees the quality of the fabrics it exports. Many artisans and

cooperatives have benefited from ARTEXCO yarn.

*We are ISO 9000 qualified, and we produce ecological, non-polluting yarns. We are selling our yarn to about 20 export companies because the demand is already coming, 10 dozen shirts made with certified ARTEXCO yarn. We are the only ones with ISO 9000 certification. Our yarn is ecological yarn, and we have an artisanal and semi-industrial plant.*¹⁴

Another area where efforts are being made to improve the possibilities of competing in the international market is the matter of new designs.

*I believe that in addition to looking for people for marketing, we must look for national people specialized in design for the development of new products. People coming out of the universities have a very closed vision, they are very closed-minded because they do not have much vision of the global market. So all of us exporters, need to bring in designers from abroad, and that is very important, so design and marketing go hand in hand.*¹⁵

The problems faced by artisans in terms of marketing are diverse. Among them are those mentioned above: quality and innovation of the designs. The interviewees referred to the lack of public policies on the part of the state to support the artisan sector.



¹³ A type of skirt used by indigenous women as part of their attire. It is formed by a long fabric that is adjusted to the waist in two ways: pleated, as used in Alta Verapaz and Quetzaltenango or by wrapping the body giving several turns to it.

¹⁴ J. A., Quetzaltenango.

¹⁵ J. A., Quetzaltenango

On the other hand, national insecurity makes it difficult for artisans to travel to markets with their products for fear of being robbed. The country's general economic crisis directly affects the artisan sector, since the population does not have the resources to buy their products, and the artisans do not have enough capital to resist.

*The cost that this fabric represents for the consumption of women, is increasingly, let's not say so high, but within the possibilities that the indigenous have in acquiring this type of clothing.... So they have already opted to wear skirts, but no longer with typical fabrics. Or pants, which is the most common thing that can be observed in the communities, mainly in the youth, which is where the change of not consuming the typical costume is more noticeable. But it is because of the price.*¹⁶

It is important to highlight that a series of industrial products are displacing handmade products, since they are much cheaper. Among them we can mention China tableware (instead of ceramic ones), quilts (instead of wool blankets), the blender (instead of the grinding stone), caps (instead of palm hats), skirts or pants (instead of cortes), etc.

2. HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION IN RELATION TO THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF GUATEMALANS TO THE UNITED STATES.

Migration to the U.S., as in the rest of the country, has increasingly intensified.

Migration here in Totonicapán began in the nineties, more or less. Although, perhaps, before the nineties there were already some working, although they were very few and counting those from here in Toto there were maybe five or others, but very few. From the nineties

*onwards, it was not much too. But from 2001 onwards, a large number of people traveled and if you go to each community, there are already hundreds of people who have left in each community.*¹⁷

Earlier we indicated that there were labor problems in the sector, and among other reasons, there was migration. All the interviewees mentioned it as one of the main causes.

*In terms of labor, in terms of migration, many young people prefer to leave the props and go elsewhere; and then when it comes to saying "who wants to work in this" there are very few. Although there are always some, because we are not going to say that there are no more, but workforce has become more and more scarce.*¹⁸

*Because of a lot of emigration to the United States, many people are leaving and there are no longer people who dedicate themselves to weaving. In all the communities there has been emigration, mostly of men. So there has been little labor for production.*¹⁹

What is happening is that they are demotivated, and the media have taken it upon themselves to spread the word that there are better opportunities abroad. So people have emigrated. I believe that the number of artisans that used to exist before has been decreasing, and it has also been decreasing among the young people.



¹⁶ A. I., Quetzaltenango.

¹⁷ L. Ch., Totonicapán.

¹⁸ L. Ch., Totonicapán.

¹⁹ S.B., dirigente de la Asociación de artesanos para el desarrollo integral de occidente de Guatemala-ASODIGUA, Salcajá, Quetzaltenango.

*Many of them emigrated to the United States and they say that they have a better income. If you analyze Salcajá, how many people from Salcajá are living in the United States? How many people from Huehuetenango? How many people from other places?*²⁰

Skarwan (1998:17), at the time of his 1996 study, reports this problem: “In spite of Salcajá's dynamic economy, many people, especially men, seek their fortune in the North. *If so many had not gone there, how many weavers would there be today!* The President of the Casa de la Cultura de Salcajá reflects. One estimate speaks of 6,000 sacabeños (people from Salcajá) in the United States”.²¹

It is clear to those interviewed that the motives are to obtain higher income and that the artisanal activity cannot compete with what can be earned in the USA.

*They are forgetting about work; they don't want to do this anymore and they are leaving. Because they are not earning the same as they do over there and it is not the same way of living, of eating, even if they are going to suffer. Because they have money saved to spend there, or to send, that is to say, it is the volume of how much they earn. Let's say that a well-trained carpenter earns Q.100.00 a day here and if he goes to the United States he earns Q.400.00 a day. That is what a person from here wants!*²²

As we said above, the chain of knowledge transmission from generation to generation is being broken. It is not only the young, trained craftsmen who are leaving, but

also those who should have learned the profession but did not. What is happening is that trades traditionally carried out by men are being developed by women.

*There are times when the producer says, “I am going to form another loom because I have one”, but there is no one working there. That is why there are many women working in the loom, producing, because there is a shortage of labor.*²³

Women have traditionally worked on the backstrap loom, but the standing loom has been a male activity. In the same way as has happened with agriculture and other economic activities, in the absence of men, it is women who take on these tasks. However, this raises another type of problem related to the processes of social reproduction, which to a large extent fall on women. Tasks such as childcare, the transmission of one's own culture, etc., have historically been assigned to women. And here we ask ourselves, who supplies this care, given that there is no institutional support to do so? Although it is true that we did not have the opportunity to inquire directly, we dare to suggest that artisan women, and working women in general, rely on their social networks and, more specifically, on their family networks (mother, sisters, sisters-in-law, etc.).



²⁰ J.A., Quetzaltenango.

²¹ Esta afirmación habría que relativizarla, ya que la encuesta realizada por la OIM en el año 2002 indica que del municipio de Salcajá sólo 542 trabajadores viven en EUA.

²² Artesano participante del grupo focal realizado, Quetzaltenango.

²³ S.B., Salcajá, Quetzaltenango.

According to the interviewees and as we have seen for other economic activities (Cf. Molina Loza, 2004:25), the remittances received by the artisan family are not used to be reinvested in artisan production, or if they are, it is only to a small extent. What they do, however, is that they generate other living conditions, which can then be projected, in some way, in their activity. For example, remittances allow for a certain liquidity that, in turn, facilitates access to and obtainment of credit to be used in this activity, as the following interviewee points out.

Remittances have never had a specific impact in relation to handicrafts. Most of the people who leave, if they don't build, then they look for land to buy and everything stays there. So, the woman who stays in the handicraft industry continues. She looks for a loan to reinvest in her weaving process, but what they send from there, they use it for other things: to build houses, to buy land, and that's as far as they have gone. At least with the people we are working with, that is what we have realized. And, of course, we have noticed other families that have been able to improve their houses, but in the handicrafts they continue the same with the same capital.²⁴

I think that most of the people who go there are there for their own personal good. For example, their son, whoever he is, practically, builds his house, does all that. I also imagine that they are helping their parents to keep their workshop well maintained. I guess, but you can't see the capital that has already grown a lot. I don't think so. The truth is, because the children maintain their very personal projects, also, with what they have made in money. They have bought their houses;

they buy their land. Because now what we have, in almost all the communities, are the constructions; and then that is the product of the boys who are there. Practically they have their objective of where they are investing their money.²⁵

As far as I know, they do not help with remittances for artisan production, because they have become independent. Before traveling, they got married, they already left a family and then it is another family different from the parents' family. So I don't think that the remittances have come to solve this type of problem, because these young people are totally independent from their parents.²⁶

It is known that in other countries what has been called the nostalgic market is taking place, which is nothing more than exporting to the USA, to the regions and cities where migrant workers are located, articles typical of the country. In the Guatemalan case, some of these products could be handicrafts. According to those interviewed, this is not happening. It happens on a personal level, when a family member visits and takes advantage of the opportunity to bring these types of articles, but it is not a formally established trade. However, we personally observed Guatemalan stores in cities in Florida (AUA), for example the so-called Guate linda in Amoquille or other similar stores in Lake Worth or Indiantown, where most of the items on sale are of Guatemalan origin. This phenomenon needs to be studied further at the destination sites.



²⁴ S.B., Salcajá, Quetzaltenango.

²⁵ L. Ch., Totonicapán.

²⁶ E.S., Totonicapán.

What one of the interviewees reports is that some artisans, who have been living in the U.S. (and also in Mexico) for some time, start to produce their handicrafts to sell them there.²⁷

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the context of the economic crisis in which the country finds itself, the artisanal sector faces a series of problems, at different levels, which means that, in spite of being a labor and subsistence option, it is not very successful, at least not as successful as others.

We were able to confirm that one of these problems has to do with migration to the USA. Young artisans and children of artisans (who are not yet artisans) are traveling in large numbers to that destination, which is producing a workforce shortage in the sector. They are realizing the low income earned by their parents and prefer to travel to that country. In addition to this shortage, the generational chain of transmission of knowledge of the trade is being interrupted.

Gender roles within the handicraft activity, as in other economic activities, are changing due to the predominantly male migration. Since men, who traditionally carried out this activity and had to migrate, are no longer present, women are occupying these positions.

Family remittances are not, in this case, a source of financing to develop artisan activities. They are eventually used for this purpose, but their use has more to do - as has been seen in other studies - with the construction of houses, the purchase of land for building houses, household expenses, etc. However, as noted above, their receipt has indirect effects that can ultimately result in development.

Consumption patterns have been changing, either because industrial products are generally cheaper, or because returning migrants

are imposing other customs. In addition, “the growing monetization and commodification of the economy of these communities stands out... they have fully entered the capitalist economy, (...) they have experienced an increase (...) in the supply of consumer goods” (Vásquez; 2004). Thus, handicrafts are giving way to new products of industrial origin offered by the market.

In our initial hypothesis we pointed out that one of the reasons for the crisis in the handicraft sector is that the potential consumers of handicraft products are migrants who have migrated to the U.S. and, since they are absent, this has an impact on the sales levels of their products. This was dismissed by the different interviewees, the main causes being those mentioned above.



²⁷ Specifically, it refers to the production of textiles. This is interesting since it can be seen as an effect of the need for economic survival in the destination place, but also fulfilling the need for cultural and identity reproduction.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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