Documentation of Traditional Knowledge and Craft Techniques. The Case of the Sesi Jagnari Artisan Display in Erongarícuaro, Michoacán Toward Its Promotion and Dissemination

Author: Mtra. Monserrat de la Luz Moreno Romero
Adviser: Dr. Salvador Ruíz Correa.

INTRODUCTION

This research project was conducted in the municipality of Erongarícuaro, Michoacán, Mexico, located in the northern part of the state, approximately 75 km from the capital. According to INEGI (2020), the municipality's total population is 15,715 inhabitants, comprising 51.4% women and 48.6% men. The study focused on the social recognition of the artisanal textile trade, particularly the embroidery and drawn thread techniques showcased for sale at the Sesi Jagnari Artisan Display, a community-based space for craft promotion in the same locality.



Image 1. Illustrative map, State of Michoacán in Mexico. Retrieved from the web (2025).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Michoacán is one of the Mexican states with the most extraordinary artisanal diversity and cultural wealth. Craft trades represent a living expression of cultural heritage, closely tied to the identity of Indigenous communities, especially among the Purépecha people. However, these traditions face growing threats, including the influx of industrial products, the lack of generational succession, and limited market access. In Erongarícuaro, the technical knowledge and production processes of local artisans are dispersed and underrecognized both locally and regionally. This research was therefore designed to address four key questions: How have artisanal trades been transmitted within families and the community? What is the role of women in preserving, producing, and teaching these trades? What are the main challenges artisans face in keeping their practices alive? And what specific techniques, materials, and processes characterize their work?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methodology was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches across three stages: documentary research, fieldwork, and data analysis and interpretation. The textile trade was selected for its representativeness within the Sesi Jagnari collective, with a focus on embroidery and drawn thread techniques. Eight women artisans from the community participated, sharing their experiences, knowledge, and personal trajectories.

RESULTS

- Regarding the transmission of the trade, it was found that seven of the artisans learned their craft as children, between the ages of five and fifteen, while one began at age thirty. Six acquired their skills through family legacy at home, and the other two through school and community workshops. On average, the artisans have practiced their craft for 52 years, with the longest career spanning 77 years and the shortest 33. The role of women in this trade is fundamental, as all participants are women, most of whom learned from their mothers or grandmothers. In addition to their craftwork, they also manage household responsibilities, and one combines her artisanal work with food sales.
- In terms of challenges, the average age of the artisans is 65, with a range of 40 to 83 years. All work independently, and their sole point of sale is the community display, with no presence on digital platforms. Although all are affiliated with the Casa de las Artesanías de Michoacán, none receive institutional support. While six consider their trade to be economically viable, only three have sufficient capital to sustain it, and their sales occur every month.
- With respect to techniques, materials, and processes, a wide range of embroidery stitches were documented, with cross-stitch being the most commonly used, followed by cord, chain, mouse rib, sand stitch, and palm stitch. Popular designs include animals, flower bouquets, monarch butterflies, figures from the traditional “Viejitos” dance, and classic geometric motifs. In drawn thread work, techniques such as tomato skin, peach blossom, relindos, borrachos, maroma, and calado were identified. These names reflect local learning and cultural adaptation. Materials used include fabric, threads, needles, design patterns, hoops, scissors, and paints. The time required to complete a piece varies depending on the garment—such as napkins, tortilla holders, tablecloths, shirts, huipil, dresses, or rebozos—with an average production time of one month, ranging from eight days to over thirty days.

DISCUSSION

The transmission of embroidery and drawn thread techniques in Erongarícuaro is considered a family and community heritage. Most artisans learned at home, in local primary schools, or in community workshops led by foreigners who promoted the craft as a source of employment. The trade experienced significant growth from the 1950s to the 1990s. However, the main challenge to its continuity is the advanced age of the artisans and the lack of generational succession. The risk of the trade disappearing within the next ten years is a pressing and tangible concern.

CONCLUSIONS

The artisanal trade in Erongarícuaro faces significant challenges, with generational succession being the most urgent. Only one of the eight artisans interviewed demonstrated a clear family lineage in the trade, with three active generations. The Sesi Jagnari collective has served as a reference point for nearly three decades; however, it does not encompass all artisans in the municipality, thereby limiting its production and sales capacity. Fieldwork yielded a valuable visual and documentary archive that could become part of the local historical heritage. Despite the rich cultural and technical knowledge present, greater regional recognition and dissemination strategies are needed. The artisans are open to new digital marketing approaches, but their average age raises an important question: Is current production sufficient to sustain new forms of promotion and sales? The creation of community-based training workshops is proposed to revitalize the trade and reestablish it as a primary source of income and development for artisan families.

REFERENCES

- Casa de las Artesanías de Michoacán. (2025). Who are we? Government of the State of Michoacán. https://casadelasartesaniasdemichoacan.gob.mx/
- Garrido Izaguirre, E. M., & Ramírez, A. (2018). Knowledge and Memory: A University Reservoir of Traditional Trades. Annals of the Museum of America, (26), 45–65. https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7685613
- Moreno, M. (2025). Diagnosis and proposal for the promotion of artisanal textiles made on pedal looms in Erongarícuaro, Michoacán [Bachelor’s thesis, Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán].
- Novelo, V. (2004). The artisanal labor force in the Mexican industry. Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS).

ACERVO FOTOGRÁFICO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN



Artisan Arcelia Ventura. Drawn Thread Embroidery.



Artisan Yolanda Magaña. Wearing traditional clothing inherited from her mother.



Artisan Minerva Ruíz. Wearing traditional clothing.



Artisan Rosa Cruz. Embroidering a girl's cape.



Contingent of artisans from the Sesi Jagnari Exhibitor in a parade commemorating Michoacan Artisan Day.



Artisan Teresa Maldonado. Wearing traditional clothing.



Artisan Lourdes García. Showing the rebozo she is Drawn Thread Embroidery.



Huanengo embroidered by artisan Arcelia Ventura.