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A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY ON BALANCING INNOVATION AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN ARTISAN BUSINESSES OF DAVAO REGION

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Abstract

This study examined how artisan enterprises in the Davao Region navigate the balance between innovation and cultural preservation amid increasing pressures from globalization, shifting consumer preferences, and competition from mass-produced goods. Guided by cultural sustainability theory and the resource-based view, the study employed a multiple-case qualitative design involving five enterprises engaged in weaving, furniture making, woodcarving, basketry, and pottery. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document reviews, and were analyzed using thematic analysis and cross-case comparison. Findings demonstrated that artisans engage in selective innovation, integrating modern design elements, ecofriendly materials, and updated production tools while retaining traditional motifs, symbolic patterns, and intergenerational knowledge. Family labor, community validation, and spirituality emerged as central resources that reinforced cultural continuity and strengthened business resilience. Despite economic constraints such as fluctuating demand, limited institutional support, and competition with low-cost alternatives, artisans sustained their enterprises through diversified livelihoods, low-cost operations, and strong cultural identity. The study concludes that cultural artisans in the Davao Region innovate not by replacing heritage but by adapting tradition in ways that maintain cultural integrity while meeting market expectations. These insights contribute to the literature on cultural preservation and sustainable innovation and offer implications for policymakers, cultural organizations, and enterprise development programs seeking to strengthen the creative economy and safeguard intangible heritage.

Keywords: artisan enterprises, cultural preservation, Davao Region, innovation, sustainability.

Introduction

Artisan enterprises in the Davao Region play a critical role in sustaining cultural identity while supporting local economic development. These enterprises, however, operate in an environment shaped by modernization, intensifying competition, and rapidly evolving consumer preferences. Prior studies document how artisans across developing regions struggle to integrate innovation without compromising cultural authenticity, yet empirical evidence from Mindanao—particularly the Davao Region—remains limited. Existing literature often highlights the tensions between modern market demands and traditional craft practices but provides insufficient insight into how artisans practically negotiate these competing pressures.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how artisans balance innovation with cultural preservation, focusing on enterprises involved in weaving, woodcraft, furniture making, basketry, and pottery. Anchored in cultural sustainability theory and the resource-based view, the study explores how these enterprises sustain their cultural identity while adapting to economic and technological shifts. By examining their strategies, challenges, and enabling conditions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on sustainable innovation and cultural resilience within local creative economies.

Method and Materials

This qualitative research employed a multiple-case study design to explore how five artisan enterprises in the Davao Region balance innovation with cultural preservation. The cases included weaving, furniture making, wood carving, handwoven basketry, and pottery. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their recognized engagement in traditional craft and their operational presence in the local creative economy.

Data were collected through indepth interviews, field observations, and document reviews. Thematic analysis and cross-case comparison were used to draw patterns across cases. Triangulation of data sources and member checking established credibility and trustworthiness. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of artisans' practices, challenges, and strategies within their cultural and economic contexts.

Results/Findings

The findings reveal that artisans employ a range of strategies to balance cultural identity and innovation. First, design adaptation emerged as a major practice, where artisans integrate modern styles while retaining traditional motifs, techniques, and symbolic patterns. This selective innovation allows them to meet market demands without compromising authenticity.

Resource-based strategies were evident. Artisans relied heavily on family labor, intergenerational knowledge, and accumulated skills as key intangible resources that strengthened cultural continuity. At the same time, they gradually adopted new tools, eco-friendly materials, and digital platforms to improve production efficiency and market visibility.

Furthermore, support systems and relational networks played a critical role. Family support remained central across all cases, while institutional assistance though limited helped artisans access training, market exposure, and raw materials. Community validation and cultural pride contributed to resilience.

Artisans faced significant economic constraints, including low profit margins, irregular market opportunities, and competition with mass-produced goods. Despite these challenges, they sustained their craft by maintaining low-cost operations, engaging in diversified livelihoods, and creating culturally rooted products that appeal to niche markets.

Moreover, faith, perseverance, and cultural commitment shaped artisans' resilience. Their belief in the cultural value of their work motivated them to continue their craft despite difficulties, reinforcing the notion that cultural enterprises rely not only on economic resources but also on intrinsic motivation and collective identity.

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