

Handiwork as a cultural production susceptible to be a tourist attraction in Santa Catarina del Monte, Texcoco

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Abstract: The rural environment offers an economic alternative based on the binomial nature and culture. The natural resources are a tourist attraction which altogether with the cultural peculiarities difference the areas, grant them a very own identity. In Santa Catarina del Monte these natural and cultural characteristics are conjugated in the elaboration of stick-made crafts; they recreate items with Christmas motifs. Rural tourism is considered to be a motor of this zone's development, bringing economic benefits to the domestic groups who commercialize these pieces and boosting at the time visiting the forests and springs of the place.

Key words: crafts, rural tourism.

Resumen: El medio rural ofrece una alternativa económica basada en el binomio naturaleza y cultura. Los recursos naturales son un atractivo turístico que junto con las peculiaridades culturales diferencian unas zonas de otras, otorgándoles una identidad propia. En Santa Catarina del Monte se conjugan estas características naturales y culturales en la elaboración de artesanía de vara, que reproduce piezas con motivos navideños. El turismo rural es considerado como un motor del desarrollo en esta zona, trayendo beneficios económicos a los grupos domésticos que comercializan estas piezas e impulsando, a la vez, la visita a los bosques y manantiales del lugar.

Palabras clave: artesanías, turismo rural.

Introduction

Handicrafts are an important resource for the tourism which appreciates popular art expressions using different materials. Because of this, vegetal fiber handicrafts (*perlilla* shrubs) produced in Santa Catarina del Monte, municipality of Texcoco, State of Mexico, is a cultural and natural product in the shape of deer, baskets, ducks and swans, yet mainly, nativities, angels, sledges and Santa Clauses, which are figures associated to Christmas (season of the year with the highest sales for these products).

The nature-culture binomial has been successful in other countries which have witnessed an increment in the economic income of their rural populations by means of projects that underscore the cultural peculiarities of their peoples and natural surroundings. Some instances are to be found in Bahia (Brazil), where this city's art and historical heritage are promoted as tourist claim (Sansi, 2005), or the case of Spain with a broad variety of rural tourism based on gastronomy, associated to celebrations, religious acts and social events that attract food-loving tourists, who follow gastronomic routes of typical products (Pastor, 2005).

The objectives of this article are: 1) show the importance of handicraft as a cultural production susceptible to be promoted as tourist attraction as well as generator of income in Santa Catarina del Monte; 2) visualize the labor of the whole family in the elaboration of figures; and 3) show the process of elaboration and commercialization of said craft. The supposition we start from is: handiworks are part of the cultural heritage that can become an alternative of employment source in rural communities, besides it promotes the collective identity of the community and the preservation of its natural resources.

In order to obtain the information fieldwork was carried out in the community of Santa Catarina del Monte, Texcoco and in Mexico City, along the year 2005; fifty-one key informers were interviewed, among them the artisans and their families, municipal tourist authorities and delegation authorities from the community, as well as merchants. We were interested in learning the process of elaboration of the *perlilla* figures, the commercialization routes, support from the authorities and the obtaining of this natural resource from a sustainable-development vision.

Sustainable development in rural communities and promotion of tourism

Sustainable development considers respect for natural resources important, as well as the different lifestyles, habits, beliefs and values linked to the peoples' cultural heritage (Gómez, 2005). Even if from a neoliberal stance a concept of development in the sense of economic growth by means of a fast expansion of production, disregarding the ecological and social costs this sort of could bring has been sought, nowadays a human development is proposed so that:

The individual is able to progress in their dignity, through a more harmonic and healthier life and a more satisfactory education, also contributing to alleviate social inequities, and taking part into democratic institutions and, eventually, enjoying a full life where employment is guaranteed, as well as the enjoyment of free time (Gómez, 2005: 74).

On the other side, before the overgrowth of tourism, it was considered that the only ones who had free time were an elite who, in addition, were able to afford the economic expenses of tourism. Currently, the phenomenon is present in all of the social strata, to a greater or lesser extent. For instance, at weekends, the municipality of Texcoco is profusely visited by people mainly from Mexico City and neighboring municipalities, who want to enjoy with their families a day out or trying local food such as carnitas (oil-simmered pork) and barbacoa and ram mixote, besides shopping for some crafts. It is worth mentioning that although tourist expense in this sense is low, indubitably the main destination for tourism in Texcoco is Molino de Flores. This visitors' movement provides income for the zone that is an incentive for development; nonetheless, this activity's bad management can deteriorate natural resources, garbage production and mistreatment of cultural heritage. To sum up, it can cause more problems than those which it can solve.

The question, which is the central discussion is: how to make human progress compatible with the preservation of patrimonial goods? We think that an alternative is sustainable development. In this sense we agree with Masri's opinion (1997); as they state that sustainable development is supported upon five fundamental sustainable principles: 1) respect and

preserve all beings; 2) improve quality of life; 3) preserve biodiversity; 4) enable the communities to preserve their own natural and social environment; and 5) foster a worldwide alliance in favor of environment preservation. The relation of the culture-nature binomial is present in this conceptualization through rural tourism. According to Bruntland Report "sustainable tourism can be conceived as a way to satisfy the needs of both tourists and host regions, at the time the future opportunities are protected and improved" (Masri, 1997: 17). In Daly's opinion (1996), sustainable development represents the equilibrium between nature, society and culture. Nevertheless, said equilibrium is not easy to achieve, since too often the balance inclines toward an anthropocentric vision or toward an egocentric one. Because of this, tourism approached from sustainable development seeks to offer quality to tourists, fostering the natural and cultural development of each region, as it preserves the natural attractions and the identity proper to the zone. Likewise, it provides economic advantages and opportunities as it creates employment sources and makes basic services broader, such as better roads, piped water, electric light, telephone, restaurants and hotels. On the other hand, it is not possible to think of sustainable tourism disregarding human resources. According to Gómez:

It has to be taken into account that the appreciation of a collective toward its heritage is a first-order encouragement in views of its protection and preservation, and additionally its enjoyment and use. What is more, such recognition of the attributions of the heritage among their holders is the necessary spur to make its setting into value and the management it implies possible (2005: 79).

To the extent that a community is proud of its cultural and natural heritage, it is possible to manage resources in a sustainable manner balancing the search for economic resources and the protection of said heritage. A way to achieve this is to start rural tourism activities. The definition of rural tourism is not easy and there are opposed opinions in this respect. A possible definition is the following: "the search for contact with the ways of life, activities and surroundings proper to the rural world, stimulated by the lure of authenticity"; which "... would place rural tourism in a dynamic context" (Jiménez, 2005: 131). According to this authoress, rural zones are characterized by the following aspects: low demographic density, small-

sized human settlements and far from each other, productive activities based on agriculture, livestock production and forestry, as well as the preservation of traditional social structures. All of this arises interest from visitors and tourists, altogether with leisure possibilities; these would be the characteristics of rural tourism.

Let us pinpoint, rural tourism can be considered as a modality of cultural tourism, from the moment its main attractive is to show a different culture, the rural one, to an urban public interested in seeing it. Nonetheless, as a fundamental characteristic, these rural tourists go to a territory to rest and approach the reality of a world that surrounds them. Thus, they devote a part of their time to discover a new environment that is shown through heritage (Grande, 2005).

In the same way, we must bear in mind that cultural tourism implicitly carries two fundamental elements. The first, *authenticity*: rural environment exists as a reality, it does not have to be invented or recreated; it simply is. In the second place, the visitors are totally immersed in this reality. They are not mere spectators who observe a treasure from the outside of a museum showcase; they are inside such reality they visit, they are actors and protagonists.

Due to the aforementioned, we should consider rural heritage an important treasure for both the communities, as basic element of social stability and referent of their identity, and as a representation of an added value of a territory, from the point of view of tourist development. Now it is necessary to enter dynamics that project said modality onto new possibilities, which adequately position a territory with great heritage, such as the municipality of Texcoco is.

As if the previous lines were not enough, at international level, UNESCO recommends promoting cultural tourism because of the multiple advantages it has. Among said advantages we distinguish two, especially pertinent for Mexico's case. In the first place as it produces economic resources, and in the second, because of the dialogue produced between different cultures, since it foments respect for the different and admiration for works of art, crafts, gastronomy and folklore.

In the Mexican rural environment there is large cultural diversity which

distinguishes communities from each other, providing new forms of handicrafts, food, clothing, languages, world-views, beliefs and values. This richness contrasts with economic poverty caused by de-agriculturalization, since in the current decade agriculture does not offer employment of alimentary self-sufficiency; as a consequence, the migratory movement of youths and women and men looking outside their community for opportunities for a better life has increased. As from the start of validity of NAFTA, public policies took no notice of rural sector as they restricted the State support for agricultural production of low-income farmers, whose products showed low competitive prices on the international markets; this linked to the high rates of credits supplied by banks and financial agencies, besides favoring the importation of cheaper agricultural products in disloyal competence with Mexican products.

Even if Mexico experiences trouble to place its agricultural products on the international market, it is undeniable that the cultural potential it has makes it a leader before other Latin American countries, the United States and Canada. Mexican cultural offer includes varied sceneries (deserts, beaches, forests, rainforests and volcanoes), as well as a multiplicity of languages, clothing, food, traditions and beliefs.

Handicrafts in Mexico

Ever since Industrial Revolution, handicraft has withdrawn before manufacturing industry, at the time people have moved from artisanal products to mass-produced goods. This was due mainly to the price, and also to the poor quality of artisanal production for popular use: pans and pots easily broken and in inconvenient shapes, shoes which did not fit the feet, unstable and uncomfortable chairs and night tables. Likewise, many hand-made products can be considered as manifestation of artisan craft (Kadt, 1984).

On the definition of craft we find that proposed by the General Direction of Popular Art of the Secretariat of Public Education (*Dirección General de Arte Popular de la Secretaría de Educación Pública*): "It is the productive activity of handmade objects or with the help of simple instruments". These objects can be utilitarian or decorative, traditional or recently invented. Popular handiwork is linked to the needs, festivities, popular or ritual tastes (Torre,

1994: 54). The realization of crafts implies knowledge and abilities transmitted from generation to generation (Bonfil, 2001), as well as the use of resources present in each habitat (UNIFEM, 1997).

Handicraft is the set of activities made by means of the hands; hence, in their elaboration no mechanical devices are used (no machines at all), but indeed tools which make work easier. Formerly, as there were not machines, all of the objects were done in an artisanal manner; that is why handiwork was not considered and is not considered *art*.

From a technological point of view, the artisanal product is defined through a process of production fundamentally manual; from an anthropologic perspective, it is the traditional way of production, as tradition provides techniques, materials and designs; from a cultural approach, it is fused with the concept of *popular art*, anonymous art transmitted from parents to children (De la Calle, 2002).

However, there are also artisanal expressions that have incorporated into the productive process new techniques, material and methods; thus, a new concept of handiwork appears, which comprehends all those activities that preserve a differential character from serial industrial production.

Within the most common tourist practices we can mention photographing and *souvenir* purchasing. Both are related with recollection gathering, elements which once in the place of origin enable the visitor to remember the visited places and show others the affording capacity such visit implies. That is why local handiwork is a *par excellence* memento. While as a heritage object it represents an indubitable advantage on the rest of heritage: it can be transported and, therefore, works as a recollection and proof that one has been to a place.

Moreover, nowadays, surrounded by technology, a special value is given to artisanal objects, as artisans' time and patience used on their elaboration is appreciated. Handiwork takes up several activities; some such as pottery, or metalworking, are to be considered as handiworks on their own, as they are considered arts (*ibidem*).

In Mexico we find a great deal of shapes and materials with which objects are fabricated. For instance, textile crafts based on cotton fiber dates back to pre-Hispanic times when *coyuchi* (ochre in color) was used. Wool was

introduced in 1526 with the arrival of the first sheep, which later were genetically improved with merino sheep brought by the Viceroy of the New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza. Silk was carried by the Galleon de Manila and its cultivation was adapted to American characteristics; for instance, in San Mateo Peñasco, Oaxaca, *hiladillo* is produced, this is a thicker silk than that from mulberry worm. The hiladillo is used by female weavers from the Mixteca de la Costa¹. Popular pottery has representation in all of the States; nonetheless we find differences in styles, techniques, finishes and uses. Clay is the basic material, even though there are artisans who use it only in its natural state there are some other who combine it with different sorts of clay to provide their pieces with cohesion. In the case of high-temperature pottery an aggregate of kaolin is required in order to harden the products. Wood is also used to make artisanal pieces and can have incrustations of shell, bone and other sorts of different-colored wood. Basketry is another branch that has a wide variety of fibers, shapes and finishes, worth mentioning those crafted in Tazquillo (State of Hidalgo), Chilapa (State of Guerrero). Among other places (Torre, 1994). Glass, metals, leather, feathers and wax are other materials used in the elaboration of Mexican crafts; thus displaying the wide variety and great beauty of the pieces from the Mexican artisans' aesthetics.

The National Fund for the fomentation of Arts (*Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artes, Fonart*) is the institution of the federal government in charge of promoting and diffusing handiwork, as well as supporting the small and large producers to promote this activity. Fonart is a public trust of the federal government, dependent from the Secretariat of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*), which seeks to promote the development of handiwork; for this end, a system of acquisitions of national production. The storing is done by means of five centers located in Jalisco, Michoacán, Oaxaca and San Luis Potosí, as well as in Mexico City.

Gender, domestic group and handicraft

According to Alberti, gender "is a theoretical-methodological category that analyzes the social construction of the sexual difference, questions the

¹ <www.uv.mx/popularte/esp/scriptphp> (03/09/05).

uneven power relations between men, between women, and between men and women; proposing change toward equity and gender equality in society” (2004: 22). This definition helps us understand the complexity of relation in the domestic sphere as it is the principal stage where boys and girls are socialized in the values of being men and women. In the rural environment these values tend to identify the latter with the household activities and the former with agricultural ones, even though women also work in the field, backyard orchards and care of animals. Likewise, men and women participate in artisanal activities. Handiwork has an intrinsic value related to the identity of the social group where pieces are done; hence, cultural value is associated with the economic one.

The crafts are associated with farming economic, as they appeared as a satisfier of needs, which has turned into a tourist object because of their rusticity, coloring and diversity. This activity has been part of the quotidian labor for many women who obtain resources by means of pieces’ production. According to Bonfil (2001), the domestic groups establish their relations around three spaces: 1) labor, as all the group’s women share activities and mutually support in both the elaboration of crafts and household chores; also men support each other, to perform the agricultural, political and religious activities; 2) kitchen, as it is a place of encounter between genders and generations to share food, stories and quotidian life; and 3) the religious altar, which is to be found inside each household of the domestic group and is the center of reunion to celebrate festivities. The socialization of girls and boys starts at six or seven years of age, when they start learning to make their first crafts. This process starts as a game where they use the material textures, shapes and designs which in their adulthood will serve them to create pieces (Turok, 1988).

Handiwork, cultural identity and gender identity are tightly bond as the material products are the result of a world-view particular to each group and, at the time, each gender. Gender identity is one of the constitutive bases of each individual, as the anthropologist Marcela Lagarde states:

From the set of the identity processes, those of gender are consubstantial to the subject, as they are fundamental and permanent in their lives. As they are associated to development of self-identity and the confirmation of psyche

and corporality of women and men, although they change they are lived as constants before others which do not last (Lagarde, 1993: 13).

The inclusion of the handiwork created by a community as a development strategy has been studied by authoress such as Stephen (1990), through the cases of Otavaleña women (Ecuador) and Cuna (Panama), as well as by Alberti (1997) in the case of Nahua women (Mexico). In all of these researches it is noticed that handiwork is a domestic activity. "In the production of crafts there is clear distribution of labor by gender and age using flexible schedules and rhythms in accordance with the needs and capacities of the household members" (Alberti, 1997: 176).

In Otavalo woolen ponchos are mainly fabricated, as it is a sierra zone with low temperatures; hanging tapestries, belts and wallets are also fabricated. Products from Otavalo are highly appreciated and are exported to Argentina, Colombia, Panama, and the United States.

The entire domestic group collaborates in the elaboration of crafts and agricultural labor. In Panama, the Cuna group abides the coastal zone of San Blas; altogether with the commercialization of coconut, the production of crafts is the base of familial economy. Internationally famous are the *molas*: blouses that are part of the traditional indigenous dress and are woven in a special manner by women. Besides, they make handbags, tapestries, skirts, among other pieces. The manufacturing of *molas* is a laborious task, and because of that they are not produced for local commerce, but for personal use and exportation. These garments' decoration alludes to women's creativity; it portrays mystical landscapes, traditional histories, sea and terrestrial animals which are found in the zone of San Blas. Cuna Men and wholesalers sell the *molas* to the tourists and in the international market earning high incomes.

Nahua indigenous from the Sierra Norte de Puebla make textile crafts and others with fiber of jonote (shrub from which the fiber is obtained, which once processed is used as a frame to make baskets, cupboards, cradles for babies and other furniture). Women are in charge of producing the textile pieces in a waist loom installed in their households. The most usual items are rebozos, huipiles (embroidered aprons), serviettes and blankets, among others, which besides being woven, these women embroider with designs

proper to Nahua mythology, vegetation and fauna of the zone. The entire domestic group takes part into the elaboration of crafts made with jonote: men gather the fiber, process it and construct the frame in the shape of the object; on their own, women are in charge of interweaving the net that gives it its final shape (Alberti, 1997).

In Santa Catarina del Monte vegetal-fiber crafts are also produced, being the domestic group which, as an assembly factory, assembles the piece. As we will see further in the text, each member of the family has a function to fulfill said purpose.

Regional context in Texcoco and Santa Catarina del Monte

The municipality is located in the oriental part of the State of Mexico. It is bordered on the north by the municipalities of Acolman, Chiconcuac, Papalotla and Tepetlaoxtoc; on the south by Chimalhuacán, San Vicente Chicoloapan and Ixtapaluca; on the east by the State of Puebla, and on the west by the municipalities of Nezahualcóyotl and Ecatepec.

Texcoco has 66 localities, counting towns and villages, and a head of municipality which holds the same name. This place is the one with the most territorial extension in the III economic region of the State of Mexico. It has roads and railways, as well as telecommunications and postal service. Its economic activity is focused on agricultural production, floriculture and fruit growing, as well as the artisanal practice of blow glass, earthenware, reproduction of archaeological figures of Teotihuacan (as its near this site) and stick figures.

The municipality of Texcoco is divided into four ecological zones: the lacustrine using the old Texcoco Lake, seat of pre-Hispanic groups which were part of the Triple Alliance, altogether with the Mexicas; the rural-urban with the southern and northern prairies; the mountainside and the sierra where Santa Catarina del Monte is (2003-2006 Plan of Municipal Development).

The municipality has interesting natural tourist attractions such as the Molino de Flores National Park, an hacienda in the XVI century, and the water springs in San Jerónimo Amanalco, Santa María Tecuanulco and Santa Catarina del Monte. Among the most recognized historical sites one finds:

the *Baños de Nezahualcóyotl* archaeological site (in the hill of the Tetzcutzinco), the *Palacio de Nezahualcóyotl* archaeological site (in the city of Texcoco, located in the Cerrito de los Melones), Huexotal archaeological site and the ex-hacienda de Chapingo, which currently hosts the Chapingo Autonomous University (*Universidad Autónoma Chapingo*), devoted to the study of agricultural sciences. In the case of the ex-hacienda and its chapel, one finds Diego Rivera's murals with agricultural topics. Among the religious attractions one finds the cathedral of Texcoco, built by Franciscan Monks between 1529 and 1672 and where the cross-breeding of the colonial and indigenous arts can be appreciated as something called *arte tecquiqui*; the Chapel of teaching, where Fray Pedro de Gante starts teaching and evangelizing, being the first school in America. These are some tourist attractions of the zone and which we have summarized; however, as Texcoco is a population deeply rooted in time, it is no surprise to find rich cultural heritage in its buildings, gastronomy and handicrafts.

Santa Catarina del Monte is located in the sierra zone, in the side of the Tláloc Mountain, which is part of the Sierra Nevada (Poyauhtécatl) whose height is 4120 m.a.s.l. In the case of the community under study, it is 14 kilometers away from Texcoco city. Santa Catarina was founded in 1418 when Nezahualcóyotl escaped from Tepanecas and went further into the mountains close to Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo (Pérez Lizaur, 1975).

Apart from its pre-Hispanic past, Santa Catarina has the largest number of wetlands in the region and is part of the largest natural reserve of the metropolitan zone of Mexico City, since it holds forests, water springs and streams which provide water, pure air and landscape (2003-2006 Plan of Municipal Development). The abundance of water has allowed the development of floriculture that has displaced the production of basic grains, such as maize, bean, broad bean, chickpea, wheat and barley. The inhabitants of the community have developed aesthetical capacities as flower-ornament producers and are very well-known in Mexico City, where they are asked to decorate halls for special events in some prestigious hotels. Moreover, they have also developed a taste for music and some of them are excellent members of bands and symphonic orchestras.

The main activity of the community was self-supply and commercial agriculture in plots about 0.50 and 1 hectare. From the neighboring forests they obtained wood, firewood, mushrooms, medicinal plants and grass for livestock (González, 1993). Nonetheless, nowadays agriculture is not the base of economy and other alternatives have been sought by the population, among them handicraft. This activity has been adopted by many a families from the community, reaching 17 percent of the total artisanal production in the municipality of Texcoco (Cosío, 2001).

Elaboration of stick crafts in Santa Catarina del Monte

The main activity of the community was self-supply and commercial agricultural in plots from 0.05 to 1 hectare of extension. From the neighboring forests obtained wood, firewood, medicinal plants and grass for livestock (González, 1993). Currently, agricultural activity has diminished and alternatives for population have been sought, among them handicraft.

In the realization of pieces with *perilla* stick the whole family is included, for the domestic group works as the productive unit, where the division of labor is included based on gender and age (González, 1993). In the distribution of the agricultural, livestock, commercial, musical and administrative men and women from this community are involved.

The recollection and commercialization of mushrooms and medicinal plants, as well as domestic labor and fowl care are exclusively performed by women; whereas forestal extraction, ass and cow herd care, firewood commercialization and music are performed by men. In this sense, there is a highly differenced gender division of labor; even if there are some other tasks which are shared by both genders, such as agricultural and artisanal activities (see table 1, at the end of the article).

In a rural community such as Santa Catarina del Monte and many more in the Mexican Republic, women are still in the private sphere of the household and some productive activities, although it is more frequently observed the participation of young women in the educational and laboring spheres, such as the Colegio de Posgraduados, the Chapingo Autonomous University and the International Center of Maize and Wheat Improvement (*Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo, CIMMYT*).

Women, on their own, are the ones who go mainly to Texcoco city and Mexico City in order to sell the products harvested in their small orchards. They are in charge of selling crafts, hay, moss and small pines used in nativities.

Process of elaboration: stick crafts

The *perlilla* stick is the raw material to elaborate figures and floral arrangements. In the fieldwork developed for this research, we were able to witness that the figures made of this material require a process that consists in six fundamental steps:

It begins with the gathering of the raw material: a wild shrub found in the sierra of Texcoco. Nevertheless, as the stick is extinct because of indiscriminate collection, the artisans have to purchase it in other places:

However, the process is as follows:

1. The stick is collected or bought when it is still green.
2. It is aired for some days so that leaves fall. Yet, it should not be left totally dry so as to be able to be worked with and bent and it does not break.
3. With this flexible stick it is simple for the mother, children, grandparents and daughters-in-law to elaborate small pieces which later will be joined to a larger figure (the tails, horns and ears); they also cut wire to hold the stick together.
4. Later adult men begin to shape the figure. They take handfuls of sticks and interweave them according to the figure they want to create: deer, ducks, wreaths, baskets, nativities, and with the wire they hold them together to create the desired shape.
5. When it is finished, mother, children, grandparents and daughters-in-law “shave” the figure. This activity consists in trimming all the sticks which go beyond the ideal form of the figure.
6. Finally, the figures are varnished in golden, silver or natural colors to offer a greater demand to buyers. This last stage is executed by men and some hired personnel.

Figures are elaborated in different sizes, designs, colors; according to their size and complexity they can take from 20 minutes up to one day. Some artisans have knowledge on welding, as there are some clients who have requested figures up to 2 meters high. A figure this size needs in order to do not fall or incline a wire rod structure, so as to provide it with shape and support for the stick and wire's weight.

The materials used are stick, wire, scissors, varnish in different tones (golden, silver and natural), pliers and hammers; and when needed, welding and wire rod. All these materials are bought in stationery and hardware shops.

Commercialization process

The commercialization process begins when the product is finished. The artisans obtain the necessary licenses to sell in the Texcoco market, where the municipality offers them a specific place to sell their products during Christmas holidays; women also go out in order to sell their crafts. They hire transportation to move their products to the place where they sell them.

There are those who carry their crafts to Mexico City by means of their own vehicles, where they offer them to established merchants in different markets, such as the Jamaica market, La Merced, or Central de Abastos. Other artisans sell their products on the road, if their household is near one.

Here the most complex part of the activity begins, as they face a series of problems to make their crafts reach the market:

- Lack of transportation to move their articles.
- Intermediaries: they go to the artisans' households to purchase figures at lower prices and resell them, or the artisans offer them in the markets.
- Disloyal competence: this is due to the fact that in the very community there are people who sell the crafts at low prices so as to sell more, and even make them with low-quality materials to be able to sell them cheaper, this places the rest of artisans in disadvantage causing poor sales.
- Lack of organization among artisans: in the community there is not

any sort of organization which helps them promote as an artisanal association, thus making the market more extensive at homogenous prices, so that all of the people have the same possibilities to sell their products without worrying about anyone who depreciates the work they do.

—Lack of artisanal promotion: in the community there are no mechanisms that promote artisanal activity, and municipal administration occasionally invites the artisans to partake into some fair or artisanal exposition; nonetheless, they do not receive help to transport their products, what is more, they have to afford their own expenses when they are invited to take part into fairs or expositions in a different State of the country.

It is very important to underline that despite that in Mexico artisanal production has been of great significance because of its variety and beauty, there is not an organization among Mexican artisans to produce their objects. The great cultural diversity and design problems have not permitted them to be competitive at international level, as they face competence from artisanal products from Taiwan, Korea, Japan and China, which are sold at lower prices. This difference is to be found in the fact that these countries manufacture with the standardization such markets demands, adopting in their designs European and North American trends, so they manage to maintain in it. Mexican handiwork is appreciated because of its dissimilarity and limited production (Turok, 1988).

Sustainability of raw material supply

The community of Santa Catarina del Monte is found into a geographic situation of steep slopes, where terraces have been formed or leveled (land stripes) as a way to counteract the erosive effects of land, as well as hold moisture in soils. Something characteristic in this community is the association terrace-household; this is why we find a household per terrace. Human settlements are far from each other, with the tendency to spread from downtown to the outskirts following the irrigation channels. The town extends from the central square; distance between households and dispersion are determined by the size of the plots and the association of this with the household (González, 1993).

Due to its geographic location, raw material supply, the *perilla* shrub, was usually found in the same community, in the high part of the forest, where this plant used to grow. Their gathering, at first, required long walks onto the mountains. They gathered and carried this material themselves; conversely, nowadays trucks loaded with said raw material arrive into Santa Catarina from neighboring communities, from Tlaxcala and communities near the volcanoes in order to supply the artisans. This sort of supply is due to the fact that artisans were no longer allowed to cut the shrub as it was causing grave deforestation in the forest.

In the artisanal community there are people who know how to cut the twigs so as the plant continues reproducing and do not affect the environment. This mechanism consists in pruning the shrub instead of uprooting the plant; according to some artisans, this form of cutting helps the plant to substitute its old twigs with new sprouts. Nevertheless, other cutters uprooted the whole plant; this caused the reduction of the shrub's extension, therefore, very significant ecological damage was made to the natural resources of the place.

Because of this situation, the authorities from the Sub-direction of Ecology of the municipality decided to become involved in the issue and prohibited the place's deforestation, as they impeded the artisans to gather their twigs.

The prohibition of using natural resources not only was because of the artisans, but also because of its old economic activity: charcoal and lumberjack activities for beams, tables and walls (Cosío, 2001). In Santa Catarina there are legal restrictions to exploit forest resources (banning season) as from the 1940's. In spite of this, the extractive activities still take place, thus provoking deforestation.

In order to counteract the damages caused to the environment, there are programs oriented to the restoration of natural resources, which consist in the work of reforestation brigades in communal lands of the region. The very community contributes to this task and takes part planting trees, in coordination with local authorities and the sub-direction of Ecology.

Some artisans consider important to preserve natural resources; they

take care of the *perilla* shrub, which does not need any special care, as long as it is cut as it should so as not to eradicate the species.

Conclusions

Here we retake the supposition we stated at the beginning of the article: *handiwork is cultural heritage that can become an alternative for rural tourism and generate employment sources in rural communities*. Because of this, we do believe it is indeed an alternative, since artisanal work is a relevant activity which provides employment to numerous domestic groups in the community. Among the most distinguishable activities are the manufacturing of floral arrangement and stick figures. Floral work is carried out by most of the inhabitants almost year-round. The making of figures is an activity which is developed from October to December, taking advantage of the season. Nonetheless, there are some people who have found another use for the stick and make bases, flowerpots and baskets for the very floral arrangements which they mostly sell in large flower shops in Mexico City or in the city of Texcoco.

Artisanal activity can mean a road for communal development. Likewise, this means for a great deal of families the generation of economic resources.

Some rural communities from the municipality of Texcoco present several characteristics appropriate to generate an activity such as rural tourism, which comprehend all the socio-cultural and natural aspects, without leaving aside the preservation of them in views of creating an attractive tourist product for those who visit this place, moreover, considering that the town already has a flow of people who arrive into its forests and springs for their enjoyment and leisure. However, with the intention to make rural tourism come true in the region it is needed, additionally to handicraft, to develop a strategy that considers the possibilities of lodging and catering for visitors in rural households, stay length, volume of people to be received, training to show the visitors how crafts are made, among other aspects of tourist infrastructure.

Rural tourism would allow artisans to obtain benefits, for this would be a way to display their products; they would also need to diversify their artisanal designs combining them with the floral arrangements they elaborate

and other ornamental articles, then commercialize them along the year.

We should not forget that one of the characteristics of tourism is the development of rural communities and the integration of their inhabitants into the laboring sphere; this is, integrating the farmers into the tourist activities in favor of satisfying their basic survival needs and the preservation of their natural and cultural resources.

The participation of the domestic group is fundamental to carry out these activities; tasks are shared by all of the members who, to a greater or lesser extent, collaborate in artisanal, agricultural production or collection, apart from being involved into the commercialization of any produced product; however, women are largely in charge of this process. The participation of the family allows having higher economic incomes by means of which to afford housing, clothing, alimentation and education expenditures.

Despite the distribution and organization in the production of handiwork has been successful for them, it is important to mention that they have problems to commercialize their products since the competence among the very members of the community, who in their toil to sell more cheapen their artisanal product, thus disloyally competing with those artisans who want to sell at better prices, yet fairer because of their products' quality.

Artisans face acute administration and organization problems so that the artisanal activity becomes noticeable. It is important, then, to promote activities leading toward artisanal development, with the intention to provide the process with permanence and stability, summoning for this end State and municipal entities with an interest in the artisanal sector, thereby, making possible the organizational, financial and infrastructural support. Nowadays, artisans have scarce possibilities for governmental supports that propitiate spaces of participation, where their products are promoted and commercialized.

Handiwork, altogether with other cultural and natural attractions make Santa Catarina del Monte a region with great potential from the point of view of rural tourism and sustainable development.

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Table 1
Labor division in domestic groups from Santa Catarina del Monte

ACTIVITIES	MEN	WOMEN	YOUTH/ CHILDREN	ELDERLY
Agricultural labor	X	x	X	
Forestal resource exploitation	X			
Livestock care asses, mules, horses, cows	X			
Mushroom gathering	X	X	X	
Commercialization of firewood, charcoal etc	X			
Commercialization of mushrooms and medicinal plants		X	X	X
Domestic work		X	X	
Fowl and pig care		X	X	X
School activities			X	
Craft elaboration	X	X	X	X
Misicians	X			
Administrative tasks in universities and research institutes: Colegio de Posgraduados, Chapingo and CIMMYT	X	X		

Source: González (1993).

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