

## Abstract

This thesis is a case study about three textile cooperatives made up of women from three indigenous ethnic groups in the Mexican state of Oaxaca: *Galvain Cuy* (Zapotecs, Teotitlán del Valle community), *Jiñi Ñuu* (Mixtecs, San Juan Colorado community) and *Kee Nshii* (Chatino people, Santiago Yaitepec community). Together with other Oaxaca handcraft cooperatives, these are connected with the community firm *Color y Cultura*, which looks after the sales and promotion of their products. This paper maps the cooperative work of the indigenous women who are involved in handcrafted textile production in the above-mentioned three communities, and how the umbrella firm *Color y Cultura* residing in Oaxaca de Juárez operates. It examines how these women perceive the cooperative business model and the *Color y Cultura* community firm, which they are connected with, as well as the advantages and weaknesses of this model of a work organisation. It also treats their ethnic self-perception in relation to their actual handcraft work and the promotion thereof.

The membership in *Color y Cultura* makes it possible for the women in the cooperatives studied to avoid dealing with a middleman thanks to its brick and mortar shop in Oaxaca. This brings them a higher profit, creative freedom and direct contact with the customer. *Color y Cultura* offers to its members various supporting and educational programs and other opportunities for selling their products. The cooperative organization of work also makes it possible for the women to share materials and ideas, as well as to divide different tasks among them according to the possibilities and dispositions of the individual members. Working in the cooperative, which requires independent organization and trips outside of the community, also helps to build self-confidence of the women involved. A problematic trait of the community firms is the variously effective functioning of the individual member cooperatives, as well as the differences between the individual members of one cooperative. Not even the *Galvain Cuy*, *Jiñi Ñuu* and *Kee Nshii* cooperatives are exactly egalitarian in this sense. In their effort to independently sell their products they sometimes have to face disagreement from their husbands and communities, emerging primarily from their adherence to local traditions and customs (so called *usos y costumbres*), which strictly specify the role of a woman in a family and society.

The representatives of *Galvain Cuy* and *San Juan Colorado* commit all sorts of manipulations with the expressions of their own ethnicity for the purpose of promoting their products. The appearance of their textiles is not somehow historically sterilized. It is influenced by personal taste and handcrafting skill of the producer, preferences of customers who in Oaxaca are primarily tourists, as well as various pressures from government and non-profit development organizations. With the inclusion of handcrafted textiles of indigenous women in global markets, there is a new problem of plagiarism and political exploitation of these products as the bearers of specific symbolism. The future

of textile handcrafted work in Oaxaca seems to be in constant dialogue between tradition and innovation, both on the level of work organization, as well as the appearance of the products. However, this persistence in a state of constant change is also proof that textile handcraft trade of indigenous communities remains a living culture reflecting the current world in a distinctive way.