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Material Heritage: From Socialization to Women's Entrepreneurship An Ethnographic Study of Female Artisans in the Capital of the Oases

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Abstract

This study examines the importance of material heritage in the Capital of the Oases, a region known for preserving its cultural and environmental values. It explores how heritage can be used as a basis for individual initiatives aimed at making effective use of available resources and ensuring entrepreneurial projects that strengthen economic independence and reduce social vulnerability in rural settings. The study seeks to highlight the importance of material heritage, produced through handicrafts directly connected with natural resources, as a successful mechanism for the economic and social empowerment of rural women. The findings demonstrate the central role of socialization in instilling cultural representations among rural women who take pride in their heritage and use it to produce tools and objects through which cultural capital is transformed into economic capital that provides a livelihood (Marvin, 2020, p. 37). Through the revival of this heritage, women derive material benefits that meet everyday needs, while also reproducing, at a symbolic level, the relationship between the ecological system and social ties within the community. Pride in identity and reliance on heritage function as a form of “social capital” that strengthens cohesion in rural settings.

Keywords: material heritage; socialization; women's entrepreneurship; handicrafts.

Introduction

Handicrafts are a form of material heritage that tells the story of humanity's accumulated and renewed creativity and reflects its relationship with its natural and social environment. Cultural heritage in general is one of the major subjects addressed by anthropology because understanding it provides access to human intellectual structures. By unpacking ideas and representations, researchers can identify practices that carry the meanings of the social system to which people belong. Among the crafts that characterize rural women in the oasis region are those based on materials produced by the date palm, which is a primary source of production in southern Algeria. Rural women have relied on palm fronds, fibers, and palm leaves to make a variety of household tools, benefiting from resources available in their local environment. This has contributed to the formation of craft knowledge and skills transmitted across generations.

With the emergence of development programmes adopted by Algeria concerning rural women's empowerment and the 2030 vision, women's aspirations to participate in and benefit from programmes contributing to the green economy and the recycling of natural materials have been renewed, with the aim of promoting the local economy. This craft has gradually become economic capital and a field for demonstrating initiative and work, leading toward “women's entrepreneurship,” through which women build social capital. This process begins with socialization within the family and among peers, which contributes to transmitting the skills and values associated with the craft and paves the way by teaching girls how to preserve handicraft skills, strengthen values of work and cooperation, and safeguard cultural heritage. As Ibn Khaldun states, craft has two dimensions: first, earning a livelihood, and second, the support provided by the state for its stabilization; here, the role of

development programmes becomes apparent in supporting this craft and enabling it to flourish and enter the field of entrepreneurship (Laibi, 2010).

Research Problem

The social and economic transformations experienced by the oasis community in southern Algeria have generated new patterns of consumption through its exposure to global markets, facilitated by digital technology. These changes have encouraged rural women to enter new economic fields, while new orientations have emerged toward investing in material heritage within the framework of women's entrepreneurship. Some rural women now seek to develop handicrafts and transform them into economic activities that generate economic capital for them and contribute to improving the family's living conditions.

Despite the competition imposed by modern industrial products, handicrafts have maintained their presence in local markets because of the skills they embody and their ability to convey the cultural and symbolic values of heritage, in addition to their role in creating employment opportunities for rural women. However, the continuity of these crafts has become linked to women's ability to adapt to social and economic transformations and to create appropriate opportunities for exploiting handicraft skills within small-scale projects based on initiative and women's entrepreneurship.

From this perspective, it is important to study the relationship between socialization and the development of women's entrepreneurial spirit through the preservation of material heritage, as this constitutes a model that combines creativity, the preservation of cultural heritage, and women's economic and social empowerment. To identify the dimensions of this complexity, the study addresses the following central research question:

How does socialization contribute to developing an entrepreneurial spirit among rural women through the preservation of material heritage?

Sub-questions

1. How does socialization contribute to the reproduction of material cultural heritage?
2. How has cultural capital contributed to strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit of rural women?

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the role of socialization in reproducing cultural heritage associated with material heritage among rural women.
- To understand the mechanisms through which cultural capital is invested and transformed into economic and social capital.
- To analyse the relationship between everyday handicraft practices and the development of women's entrepreneurial spirit by strengthening values of work, self-reliance, and financial independence among rural women.
- To highlight the contribution of material heritage to enabling rural women to acquire social and economic capital, and the role of handicrafts in supporting economic initiative and local development.

Research Methodology

To address the role of socialization in cultivating a spirit of women's entrepreneurship among rural women, the ethnographic method was adopted to describe and analyse material heritage associated with handicrafts, particularly those related to the date palm.

Drawing on field data and Pierre Bourdieu's practice approach, together with mechanisms of cultural reproduction and the forms of capital used in the study, the research seeks to understand the mechanisms through which tangible and intangible cultural heritage continues, including the knowledge and skills transmitted by female artisans from one generation to another. This contributes to preserving cultural heritage within modern society despite the economic and social transformations it has undergone.

Research Instrument

The study relied on the field interview as the principal instrument for understanding the role of socialization in the transmission of handicrafts. For data collection, eight women entrepreneurs were selected and assigned pseudonyms. They were chosen purposively from among the other artisans because of their social position and experience in handicrafts, allowing the study to explore their personal experiences and understand their practices within the social and cultural context in which they work. The interview instrument included the main themes necessary to understand how the craft is transmitted through three open-ended questions, allowing the collection of qualitative data suitable for analysis. The instrument was prepared on the basis of previous studies related to the subject and was then submitted to specialists in the social sciences to assess its content validity and its suitability for obtaining answers amenable to anthropological analysis.

Exploratory Study

The study relied on observation while attending local exhibitions of traditional industries. Interviews were conducted with eight women entrepreneurs working in traditional industries, particularly handicrafts. This contributed to expanding the field network and establishing relationships with participants.

The ethnographic study then moved to a deeper level through visits to artisans' workplaces, with the aim of learning about the techniques, methods, and means of production used in their natural context and understanding the cultural practices associated with this craft.

Previous studies dealing with traditional crafts were also consulted in order to provide a comprehensive reading of artisans' environmental awareness and culture from an anthropological perspective consistent with the research problem concerning socialization and women's entrepreneurship.

1. Study Concepts

1.1 Socialization

Socialization is the process of educating the individual so that they become a member of society. It involves both formal and informal learning through social roles and integration into the social and cultural system. It is not restricted to childhood. Anthropologists have also invoked the concept of socialization in relation to the sexual division of labour and other features of social organization (Seymour, 1992).

Handicrafts

UNESCO defined handicraft products at the international seminar on handicrafts and traditional industries held in the Philippines on 8 October 1997, in cooperation with the World Trade and Traditional Industries context, as products made by artisans either entirely by hand or with the assistance of hand tools or mechanical means, provided that the artisan's manual contribution constitutes the largest part of the finished product. Such products are characterized by their use of sustainable natural materials and may reflect ideological, social, symbolic, decorative, aesthetic, artistic, creative, cultural, and economic dimensions (Amari, 2022).

Women's Entrepreneurship

Women's entrepreneurship is an economic activity undertaken by women through establishing a new enterprise or revitalizing established traditional businesses or activities in order to benefit from new opportunities. Women's entrepreneurship is internationally recognized as a process of mobilizing women and resources in accordance with the social and cultural context. It is shaped by the ecological and natural environment and influenced by the values, customs, and cultural patterns prevailing in society, as culture contributes to directing women's practices and shaping their attitudes toward initiative, self-employment, and risk-taking (Mandal, 2023).

2. Previous Studies

- An Anthropological Study of the Furniture and Pottery-Making Communities in Gharbia Governorate (2024), by Maha Badr El-Din Nasser et al., Scientific Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Issue 52, 2024.
- Honda, Miyuki (2007). Making and Marketing Baskets: A Case Study of Basket Makers in Alleghany County, NC.
- Yadav, Uma Shankar, & Mandal, Mitu (2023). Evaluation of Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship: A Case of Indian Women in the Handicraft Industry. APPSTATE / Alleghany County materials cited in the original manuscript.

2. Ethnographic Study

2.1 The Socio-Ecological Framework of the Capital of the Oases

The oasis region is located in southeastern Algeria and has been an urban area in both the past and present. Statistics indicate that approximately 80 percent of its inhabitants are urban residents, particularly in the current period, as Algerian society has entered a postmodern phase. Nevertheless, the region continues to preserve its heritage. The Capital of the Oases is still known for its demographic density, its extensive oasis surrounded by date palms, and its palaces that preserve its cultural heritage, despite its position as one of Algeria's major economic poles and the presence of industrial bases belonging to oil companies. The oasis region has been referred to by numerous authors over the centuries and has been described as an oasis with rural dimensions. It has traditionally been characterized as a collection of innumerable small settlements, the smallest of which was known as a ksar village or oasis village. Such a settlement is a sustainable community built around a palm orchard, with the rural area forming an integrated unit that includes an ecosystem and a social structure. Relations between rural communities and their surroundings are shaped by a socio-cultural system, even where there are minor differences between the layout of built-up and cultivated areas. Life in the Saharan countryside is based on a balance among hierarchical patriarchal groups, namely families (Belguidoum Saïd, 2004).

The social composition of the region reflects the history of the distribution of rural inhabitants in the oasis area in the form of tribal groups connected by kinship ties and living among their orchards according to socio-economic and historical dimensions influenced by ecological conditions. With new social and economic transformations in men's economic activities, women's continuation of academic studies, and rural migration, the old features of the countryside have changed. Only about 3.6 percent of activities related to cultural heritage remain, maintained by older people or by a small proportion of the younger generation who preserve them as a hobby or secondary activity (Khalifa, 2020).

2.2 The Value-Based and Environmental Dimension

The ethnographic investigation conducted by the researcher with the women entrepreneurs known for their involvement in material heritage activities revealed that handicraft production depends on cultural heritage acquired by women through immersion in local culture and socialization. This begins with understanding the environment to which they belong. The methods used to select suitable palm fronds and the techniques for processing them are not arbitrary; rather, they result from an environmental and value-based motivation expressing socially inherited ideas directly related to their way of life. The date palm was present in virtually all aspects of their lives, beginning with house construction, where palm materials were used as supporting elements. Palm leaves were also present in the kitchen, whether for ovens, food preparation, storage and serving, or as raw material for handicraft production. Their utilitarian value is reflected in the care and precision with which artisans select fronds from the local environment.

This is illustrated by Umm al-Khair, one of the interviewees, who stated: "We obtain the raw materials for our work by collecting fallen palm materials or by climbing the palm to reach the trunk and extract the 'white palm leaf' from the heart of

the palm. It is the highest-quality material and is widely used in successful handicraft production.” Another woman entrepreneur who uses fronds as a basic material in her handicraft products confirmed that artisans carefully select the material intended for sale or display and distinguish between two main types of fronds (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 133):

- White fronds: used to make fans and some delicate tools.
- Green fronds: used to make mats and everyday-use utensils.



Figure: White palm fronds

All interviewees also confirmed that, despite their apparent simplicity, these handicrafts pass through several stages, beginning with the collection of the raw material—the palm leaf—to prepare it for the treatment stage (drying, soaking, and softening). All these stages are essential to ensure the flexibility of the fronds and the ease with which they can be shaped.

2.2.1 The Technical Process of Weaving Palm Fronds

Direct observation showed that weaving the fronds is the principal stage at which artistic skills become visible in shaping the product—the “cultural heritage made from palm fronds.” The product passes through several successive technical stages:

- Dividing the fronds into sections according to size.
- Interlacing and braiding the fronds crosswise to form a geometric base, usually square in shape.
- Inserting the excess ends inside the weave to conceal them and ensure the aesthetic quality of the product.
- Securing the product to a wooden support using simple tools such as glue.



Figure: The working method

Some products, such as the fan, take an average of about 45 minutes to make, reflecting the high level of skill and inherited experience of Mrs. Umm al-Khair, whom we interviewed. She confirmed that she had practiced this craft since she was 12 years old and regarded it as a skill she had acquired during childhood. During the interview, she used the fan as a model of her work and took approximately 45 minutes to complete it, drawing on all her memories and skills. She explained: “We used every palm around us. We collected palm fronds even from palms that had fallen to the ground. If the palm was standing tall, one of my brothers or a man from the family would climb it to remove the fronds with white leaves from the middle of the palm. There are no more than ten to fifteen such fronds on one palm. This is the most difficult stage for women because they need to obtain the fronds suitable for production.” She continued: “There are two types of fronds: those with white leaves, which are used to make the fan, and those with green leaves, which are used to make mats and baskets.”

3.2 The Social Dimension

If socialization is regarded as one of the most important processes through which human beings move from a natural state to the state of culture that distinguishes them from other creatures, it enables them to acquire customs, traditions, values, and

principles. It is a comprehensive process of preparation that facilitates integration into the society to which an individual belongs and enables them to bring about change within that social space through formal and informal institutions. It also contributes to reproducing tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This was clearly expressed by most interviewees during the field interviews when we discussed their history of practising handicrafts. Their answers were almost identical: they had acquired the craft within the family through the transmission of local culture, especially from mothers to daughters, within the framework of informal socialization.

Mrs. Maryam, the owner of a workshop with a commercial brand, explained that when asked about the institutes or training centres where she had learned the craft, she replied: “I learned this craft during the summer holidays at my grandfather’s house in the countryside, where I found all the women sitting in the courtyard, talking and working for long hours. Curiosity led me to learn it; I felt that it was a kind of handcraft game. I also received encouragement from my grandmother, who was proud of my simple achievements. When I finished my studies, experienced unemployment, and became more open to society through trips to neighbouring countries, I noticed that these simple products were sold at exhibitions and valued by tourists. That is how I took it up professionally, perhaps by chance, and introduced a number of modern changes that distinguished my work.” She continued: “I did not attend any centre to learn it; rather, I invested in my simple talents.”

The findings show that women entrepreneurs took risks and developed an opportunity that others in their community had not perceived, exploiting the gap between generations in aesthetic innovation. This dimension had not emerged through socialization, which focused on the utilitarian function of the product rather than its aesthetic dimension. This reflects the strength of investing in symbolic and cultural capital in order to build economic and social capital through practice (Nialand Moukhri, 2020, p. 12).

4.2 The Economic Dimension of Women’s Entrepreneurship

Ibn Khaldun’s theory concerning the need for city dwellers to cooperate in order to increase their gains, which leads to general prosperity, welfare, luxury, and economic flourishing, helps explain the economic dimension of women’s entrepreneurship among the artisans studied (Laibi, 2010). In a conversation with Fatima, one of the interviewees, she confirmed that this craft had previously represented the family’s main source of income. Products were sold in local markets by men or older women in the family. Until relatively recently, date palms were the main resource of oasis inhabitants. The principal economy was primarily based on date production and on using all components of the palm to supply handicrafts as a local product, in addition to seasonal products. This production enabled the region to engage in commercial exchange over previous decades (Khalifa, 2010).

One interviewee explained, in response to a direct question about the absence of men from the palm-frond craft despite their being the main source of raw materials: “There are some men who practise this craft, but they do not practise it permanently, and the number of male artisans is very small. This craft is almost exclusively practised by women because, in the past, women had no other source of material income or economic activity, unlike men, who generally worked in agriculture or trade.” This made handicrafts more closely associated with rural women and their role within the family and community.

Consequently, handicrafts have moved beyond their traditional dimension to form the nucleus of locally based women’s entrepreneurship, relying on individual and family labour. Women use natural resources and inherited manual skills to produce tools that meet everyday needs and the requirements of the local market, reflecting the transformation of handicraft practice from a subsistence activity into an economic resource that contributes to rural women’s economic independence.

3. Cultural Representations of Handicraft Practice

The findings show that handicraft work is built on value-based cultural foundations originating in socialization and directly connected with nature before becoming an economic source. Adequate knowledge of the practice and of the way the craft and its materials—such as “fibre”—are handled, together with knowledge of how to clean and soften it and then transform it into twisted and handwoven threads, are cultural practices in themselves that reflect adaptation to and symbolic and material exploitation of local resources (Karimzadi, 2019).

3.1 Environmental Representations

Through field interviews, we observed that artisans are aware of the functional values of the ecological system. All the resources provided by the date palm are used in the work, together with some other natural products. Safiya, one of the interviewees, confirmed this by saying: “We invest every part of the palm and can transform it into a product used in everyday practice. From it we make the fan for ventilation in summer, the incense burner for perfuming houses, and the parasol for protection from the sun. We also make kitchen utensils, such as the food cover and the couscous steamer, for storing and preparing food. Even the fibre was used to make rope. From the white palm fronds we make everything we need in our homes.”

The artisans do not limit themselves to the natural colour of the white fronds; they also dye them in various colours, such as royal green, burgundy, violet, and rose red, according to the colours of nature.



Figure: Method of dyeing palm fronds

She continued her account of the source of colours in the past: artisans derived colours from nature. She explained that they obtained colours from flowers and natural herbs and described the dyeing process, beginning with heating water in a large container to a particular temperature, then adding the required dye colour as well as the yellow colour formerly obtained from turmeric to give the material a shine. The fronds were wrapped around the hand before being placed in the container for dyeing, moved for about 15 minutes, then removed and placed in the shade to dry.

In another interview with Umm al-Khair, one of the women entrepreneurs who works with fibre, she made a rope during the interview. She explained that the fibre was washed thoroughly and the areas with very dense and intertwined fibres were removed, while the part with more open and less compact fibres was left in plastic after being carefully cleaned for three hours until it softened and became easier to handle.

While describing traditional methods, she separated the natural fabric into very fine threads and explained: “We twist them using the palms of our hands until they form a thin thread. These thin threads are then used to make a thick rope by holding pieces of the thin rope between the toes and twisting them together with the palm of the hand.” She added that she controlled the length of the rope according to her needs and the purpose for which she wanted to make it. The weaving process took about an hour, during which she produced a rope approximately two metres long. This reflects a deep integration between local culture and the natural environment.



Figure: Rope made from natural fibre

3.2 Economic and Social Representations (Social Capital)

A comparison of the study findings with the local reality confirms that handicrafts have constituted an important economic resource for women in the rural context and have supported the family economy. This was confirmed by Hajjah Mubarakah, one of the women entrepreneurs who participate in international exhibitions and have specialized in palm-frond production since childhood. She stated: “This craft was the only financial resource for the women of the area for a considerable period in the past. It distinguished us from other women in the region and continues to do so to this day. As for me, I learned this craft from my mother, who learned it from her ancestors.” She then recalled the period when she worked under the family’s authority before creating her own commercial name at the local and national levels: “During the summer, we worked for long hours throughout the week. At the end of the week, my father would take these products to sell them at the weekly market, held on Saturday morning, and return in the evening with the money and loaded with purchases.”

She continued: although the products were simple—mats for household use and mosques, and baskets and containers for transporting and storing products—this traditional industry has not only met material needs but has also established social and economic relationships within the local community.

Maryam also addressed the artistic dimension when asked how she had used her talent to produce aesthetic artistic forms compatible with the contemporary period. She explained that, after entering this field, she understood why artisans had avoided aesthetic artistic production: the society in which they were raised emphasized making objects with utilitarian value, most of which were intended for practical work rather than decoration. Their focus was on quality and durability. She therefore exploited this gap to assert herself and compete. Her products retained direct and everyday uses while also being distinguished by quality and decorative features suitable for display and gifts.

The study demonstrates that handicrafts are not merely craft activities; rather, they constitute an integrated social, cultural, and economic practice that contributes to reproducing values and knowledge through socialization and opens the way for forms of traditional women’s entrepreneurship in rural settings. Palm-frond products are also part of the family’s social and economic capital. The main motivation for participating in symposiums and exhibitions is to gain social status within the local community and invest that status in local and national competition.

4. Discussion of Findings

- The findings show that handicrafts in the oasis region are not merely simple traditional activities but complex social practices in which cultural, economic, and symbolic dimensions intersect. This supports the anthropological view that social practices are not simply acts produced in the present but are actions directed by the past. Handicrafts are a mirror that recounts the history of rural women’s cultural activity (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 33).
- At the level of socialization, the acquisition of handicraft skills takes place primarily within the family. Women begin acquiring craft skills from childhood through practice and participant observation, reflecting the strength of acculturation. They learn automatically through informal knowledge within the rural community. This form of socialization explains the continuity of the craft across generations, but it also limits the introduction of aesthetic innovation because practice is based more on imitation than creativity. This is consistent with Honda’s (2007) previous study, which reported that people learned these crafts from family members and that these skills were inherited from the past and had at one point been threatened with extinction, with few early reliable accounts of their origins.
- With regard to entrepreneurship, the findings indicate that the craft does not face a major difficulty in identifying a target audience for moving from simple practices to a clear economic function within the family, because the history of the craft predates the current artisans. It has long existed and has frequently constituted a source of income or livelihood support, especially within the context of the informal rural economy. Nevertheless, this entrepreneurship remains more “traditional” than “modern” because it does not rely on institutional organization or sophisticated marketing strategies, but rather on direct individual and family production (Nialand Moukhri, 2020).
- From the perspective of cultural representations, the data reveal that artisans do not view palm fronds merely as raw materials but as part of an integrated ecological and cultural system. Interaction with the date palm reflects both a functional and symbolic relationship: natural resources are transformed into tools for everyday life, thereby strengthening the deep connection between human beings and their local environment.
- The findings also show that traditional products have a dual dimension: a utilitarian dimension that meets everyday needs and a social dimension that strengthens community ties, for example through the exchange of tools and their use on social occasions. This explains how handicraft becomes a form of “social capital” that strengthens cohesion in rural settings.
- The study reveals challenges resulting from economic and social transformations and their effects on rural women and modern women entrepreneurs whose activities are based on innovation and marketing. These challenges are linked to a conservative social structure and limited training in management and marketing, despite the high level of manual skill. Nevertheless, handicrafts remain a key to family success and community development (Nirongo, 2019).
- Accordingly, handicrafts can be regarded as a clear model of the intersection between socialization and economic practice. The craft simultaneously produces cultural identity and social continuity, while remaining capable of restructuring in order to become a modern and sustainable entrepreneurial activity.

4.1 Analysis

- According to reports by United Nations bodies, modern economic transformations have brought approximately 60 percent of informal work into the formal economy in order to ensure protection and employment security. Field data indicate that most women worked within traditional crafts according to a socio-cultural logic rather than as an economic system governed primarily by material profit. The basis of this activity was socialization and the social environment, with the family responsible for reproducing and developing the practice by ensuring its continuity and teaching it to successive generations. This contributed to creating opportunities that developed through “reliance on cultural heritage,” transforming it into entrepreneurship and increasing opportunities for innovation (Institute of Sociology, 2025).
- From an entrepreneurial perspective, handicraft activity performs a genuine economic function, but it remains within the informal economy, based on individual production and limited local marketing. This situation demonstrates the need for institutional organization and effective approaches to integrate these crafts into economic value chains, thereby enabling their transformation from cultural activities into sustainable small-scale enterprises.
- At the cultural level, the relationship between artisans and production materials—palm fronds, fibre, and the date palm—shows that their thinking has moved beyond a merely functional environmental perspective to a symbolic level. Nature is not considered only a resource but a vital space that determines patterns of living and production. This relationship can be described as a “symbolic economy,” in which the utilitarian function of the product intersects with its cultural meaning.
- The analysis also highlights the dual role of craft products: on the one hand, they meet direct everyday needs; on the other, they reproduce social relationships within the rural community through reciprocal exchange and participation in exhibitions and cultural events. Craft therefore becomes an element in building social capital rather than merely a productive activity.
- Compared with the previous study by Maha (2024), most traditional activities constitute cultural heritage acquired by women through socialization. This has made the traditional model capable of development and of achieving a clear leap within the context of modern economic transformations. Competition among women and girls in the marketing of handicraft products, redesign, and organization is not necessarily viewed as problematic because the activity is regarded as an extension of ancestral work. Consequently, the transition from a “subsistence craft” to “women’s entrepreneurship” did not require a complete restructuring of training and marketing but only some simple modifications (Maha, 2024).
- Overall, the study reveals that socialization produces not only technical skills but also shapes women’s perceptions of the craft and of their economic role, which explains both the strength of continuity and the weakness of transformation.

4.2 Transforming Cultural Heritage into Women’s Entrepreneurship

The ethnographic data show that women’s entrepreneurship represents a central mechanism for transforming material heritage from a mere traditional practice into a developable economic activity for women. In its original context, the craft is primarily linked to socialization within the family, where skills are acquired informally and production is directed toward everyday household use or limited sales in local markets.

The study findings converge with the previous study in showing that the idea of participating in women’s entrepreneurship did not emerge in a vacuum but is strongly influenced by the cultural context. Culture functions as a general framework that directs aspirations and practices. Successful women’s entrepreneurship requires a cultural environment that supports rationality, equality, and acceptance of social and economic transformations, by integrating entrepreneurial logic and transforming local practices and cultures from subsistence activities into economic projects based on continuous production, reorganization, and market integration. This transformation requires a shift from “self-sufficiency” to “added value,” in which the craft becomes a sustainable source of income rather than merely a traditional activity (Mandal, 2023).

Comparison with the previous study highlights the role of entrepreneurship in restructuring rural women’s relationship with the craft. It contributed to changing the product as women moved from the role of the “home-based producer” to creating artistic pieces compatible with contemporary changes, with economic effectiveness capable of entering competitive markets and enabling decision-making, production management, and marketing. This transformation strengthens women’s economic independence and gives them a new position within the social structure (Maha, 2024).

Despite this potential, the study shows that the transformation affecting handicraft activities remains limited because of the absence of training in marketing and management and the weak integration of these crafts into formal economic networks. Consequently, entrepreneurship here remains more “latent” than “institutionalized”; it exists at the level of practice but still requires substantial adjustments.

Accordingly, cultural heritage represents a promising field for women’s entrepreneurship, provided that it is supported through training, organization, and links with markets, allowing it to be transformed into an effective economic project that contributes to local development and the empowerment of rural women.

Conclusion

Handicrafts are a human activity that reflects material culture and contributes to meeting various needs, including essential, supplementary, and recreational needs. Rural women have played an active role through socialization in transmitting these crafts across generations and adapting them to contemporary economic transformations until they acquired economic value in a context characterized by limited employment security. Development programmes have played an effective role in transforming these crafts into entrepreneurship by enabling talented rural women to make profitable and direct investments, both in economic capital and in social capital. This is evident in the views of the interviewees, who expressed strong satisfaction and conviction because they had been able to transform these simple activities into entrepreneurial endeavours

through which they increased material returns, improved their own and their families' material and social conditions, achieved self-realization, and contributed to development projects.

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