

Creative entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe: A profiling of great Zimbabwe craft centre

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Abstract

Zimbabwe's education 5.0 policy has advocated for creative industries to play a key role in the sustainable economic development of the country. Creative industries have been recognised for their potential in creating pathways for job creation, tourism and creating products that bring direct financial gains to community. This paper seeks to identify the main characteristics of creative entrepreneurs, investigating levels of business acumen and access to institutional support services by entrepreneurs, exploring opportunities and challenges faced by these entrepreneurs and proposing strategies that can be implemented to support and promote the establishment of growth oriented enterprises. Craft industries are an important sector of Zimbabwe's creative industries and this paper explores this entrepreneurial venture. The research targeted Great Zimbabwe Craft centre as its study population and data was gathered using key informant interviews. The research revealed that there is general lack of institutional support and business acumen to successfully direct creative craft entrepreneurship activities towards growth. Craft entrepreneurship offers a good opportunity for employment creation and sustainable livelihoods however it is faced with challenges that when rightfully addressed can contribute more to the economic wellbeing of the entrepreneurs.

Keywords: creative entrepreneurship, Zimbabwe craft centre

Introduction

Pratt (2008) define creative Industries as those industries which combine the creation, production, and commercialization of creative elements where as creative entrepreneurship represents the practice of setting up a business in a creative industry. The creative entrepreneur is an investor in talent, either his/hers own or others. The Craft Sector forms an important component of creative industries in most developing countries. UNESCO (1997) define crafts as items produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. The special nature of craft products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant. Rogerson (2010) posits that craft products must be eighty percent handmade from different materials, which may include clay, natural fibres, beads, recyclable materials and textiles.

Crafts are a part of the culture of a nation or ethnic group and represent a key component of socio-economic life. Beyond their aesthetic and cultural dimensions, handicrafts present several interesting socio-economic characteristics:

- The handicrafts sector is a home-based industry, which requires minimum expenditure and infrastructure to establish. Therefore it can create jobs at a minimal cost.
- In general this sector uses existing skills and locally available raw materials. Inputs required can easily be provided and product adaptation is less expensive than

Investing in energy, machinery or technology.

- Income generation through producing crafts (which is often an important activity in rural societies) does not disturb the cultural and social balance of either the home or the community.
- Many agricultural and pastoral communities depend on their traditional craft skills as an essential source of income in times of drought, lean harvests, floods or famine. However, even in times of plenty their traditional skills in craft-making are the basis for additional income generating activities that are a natural means to social and financial independence.

Deloitte (2012) has argued that the craft industry is a leading component of economic growth, employment, trade, innovation and social cohesion in most developed countries. The craft Industry offers monetary benefits and can be used to prevent the intensification of poverty. It provides opportunities for heritage communities to earn a living and also to keep alive traditional products, processing techniques and knowledge (Buiten & Bird, 2007) The UN (2010) postulates that crafts are the most important creative goods, accounting for sixty percent of the world market for creative goods and services.

This alone is an indication that there is a growing market of opportunities for craft producers, both locally and internationally. In Zimbabwe, the craft industry has helped alleviate poverty and create employment and as a source of income in an otherwise struggling economy and has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the country's ailing economy.

Crafting and Craft Entrepreneurship

Shane (2003) defines entrepreneurship as the search and use of opportunity for the benefit of those applying it. Entrepreneurs 'change or transmute values' (Drucker 2011)^[4], creating something new. Entrepreneurship can also be the act of creating new opportunity. Howkins (2001) postulates that creativity is seen as a driving force in economic growth hence often presented as complementary to entrepreneurship, with entrepreneurial action deemed necessary to negotiate shifting economic climates (Rentschler, 2003)^[13].

Depending on national legislation, different countries have different specifications of the professional activities in the craft sector. Understanding what craft is has been changing over the years and up until now, there is no common definition agreed by experts in the area (Tregear, 2005; Ratten, Ferreira, 2017)^[16, 12]. Some mention it is about manual work and functionality, although, others argue it is about creativity, innovation, traditional skills and techniques used to produce craft objects (Risatti, 2007)^[14]. According to Oxford dictionary craft is "an activity involving skill in making things by hand" or "work or objects made by hand" (LEXICO, 2019). Similarly, the craft is defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as "an occupation or trade requiring manual dexterity or artistic skill" (Merriam-Webster, 2019)^[11]. Traditional craft is hand-made; however, contemporary crafting includes also machinery (Mečnika *et al.*, 2014).

However, researchers stress the use of only hand-controlled machines in the crafting process (Pöllänen, 2009). In crafting the degree of hand-made can vary, but there must be some features made by hand. Probably the most concise definition is "craft involves the application of human skill and invested time" (Rosner, 2009,).

As there is no common definition of crafts, there is no one common definition of craft entrepreneurship, although it is considered to be the driving force of the development of economies. For the purpose of this research, we combine nowadays available broad definitions of entrepreneurship as creation, organisation and managing a business venture (Gartner, 1990)^[5] and above-mentioned definitions of crafts and propose the following meaning of craft entrepreneurship –creation, organisation and managing a business venture which involves application of human skills and hand-work and involve the creation of utilitarian products or services with some degree of aesthetic value. Thus, a craft entrepreneur is someone, who earns his/her living by creating or selling something of value partly using hand-work.

Research Methodology

The study is mostly based on primary data collected from craft entrepreneurs at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre. Data was mainly collected through an open ended interviews to the owner- managers of the craft firms. The collected data was qualitatively analysed following the themes that emerged. The target population was all the craft firms based at Great Zimbabwe craft centre and a convenient sample of 18 Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurs participated in the study. A convenient sampling was preferred because the researcher chose to use subjects that were easily available (Siegle, 2002). Responses from open-ended interviews were recorded and coded according to themes that emerged. Data was then analysed according to the emerged themes and findings and conclusions were arrived at.

Research Findings and discussion

A profile of the Great Zimbabwe Craft centre enterprise

Located about 25km east of Masvingo town, the Great Zimbabwe Craft centre is close to Nemamwa growth point and situated just outside Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site. It takes the form of an outdoor market as the craft producers display their crafts adjacent to the highway road which leads into Great Zimbabwe World heritage site in an attempt to capture the attention of tourist visitors.

The centre first developed as an independent 'curio shop' which specialized in baskets and clay pots at the Great Zimbabwe hotel but as more craft producers joined, the craft became more diverse to include sculptures (both wooden and soapstone), bhartic material (Fabric), bags, hats, abstract art, Zimbabwe birds, baskets, and traditional jewellery. This growth and expansion necessitated the move to the craft centres current location in search of a bigger space to accommodate growth in terms of size and products (Matunhu pes.com 2019).

Currently the Great Zimbabwe craft centre runs as a cooperative guided by a tailor made constitution, operating on Masvingo rural district council land. Craft entrepreneurs pay a fee to the Masvingo Rural district council in order to be allowed to operate form the centre.

The Centre enjoys the monopoly of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site and their signature process is the Zimbabwe bird, which is strongly linked to the Great Zimbabwe World heritage site. They also sell necklaces that have the Great Zimbabwe conical tower engraving, Great Zimbabwe conical tower candle stands as well as clay pots like those found in the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage interpretation centre. Some of their crafts have a resemblance to the things displayed in the museum.

Craft product at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre designs are traditional and functional in nature. Most craft entrepreneurs are self-taught although some have taken art lessons at school or learned a craft from other people in the community. As expected, there was much evidence that the business activities of participants in this research were driven by financial need in the absence of alternative sources of income to live on. Most of the participants mentioned that they did not make much money from their business activities, but what they did make was essential and required for survival; almost all of the participants cited specifically that they could buy food for themselves and their families from the income generated.

The survivalist orientation clearly evidenced was not the only motivation for entrepreneurship, however. There was much evidence of artisanship, artistry, pride and traditionalism amongst respondents.

The Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurship venture depends to a large extent on the tourism and trade sectors. Growth in the craft market is also associated with the rise in local interest in Zimbabwe craft fuelled by trends towards ethnic, rustic, earthy African styles and increasing national pride and the return of African values (Sellschop, Goldblatt & Hemp, 2005). The growth of the black middle class and its ability to earn and spend its income on goods and services has also impacted on the growth in this market (Wesgro, 2000).

The reliance of the Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurial venture on the tourist market has made it to be seasonal in nature because tourism is affected by seasonal demand, peaking mostly during holidays (Kaiser *et al.*, 2005).

However, this craft industry is facing limited growth in the domestic market as there seems to be no effort by the craft artisans to penetrate the local market because of their over reliance of the international market. This has made the craft industry survivalist rather than sustainably oriented. Its reliance on a tourist market has made the craft industry an unreliable source of income.

Challenges faced by the Great Zimbabwe Craft Industry

One of the major challenge facing Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurs is lack understanding of what the market needs, which leads to an inability to formulate appropriate and competitive product and marketing strategies (Grobler, 2005). They often sell similar products that do not address market demands and they have difficulty in accessing the markets (Makhitha & Bresler, 2011; Hay, 2008). The Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurs mainly stock for tourists and have failed to attract a meaningful local market, with locals only buying products with utilitarian value such as clay pots. Craft entrepreneurs at Great Zimbabwe also lack skills in product design. An interview with craft entrepreneurs at the centre revealed that most of them rely on buying unfinished craft products from craftsman and their input the craft production is to polish the crafts into end products. Craft entrepreneurs order similar product designs and their products lack innovativeness and uniqueness as most of them can still be found on any other craft centre around the country. This is detrimental to their success and survival since craft entrepreneurs who succeed do so by selling unique products that are new, relevant and meet the needs of customers (Littrell & Miller, 2001). The Great Zimbabwe craft entrepreneurs has an overreliance on the tourist market attracted by the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site and have failed to initiate any marketing strategies on their own other than displaying their products on the road for visibility. They possess limited knowledge about the lifestyles and product preferences of their potential local customers and the promotional strategies needed to target these customers. There is need for craft entrepreneurs to understand the needs of the market and formulate appropriate marketing strategies for each market segment. When asked about the kind of assistance needed to make street businesses growth oriented, most respondents alluded to the provision of, capital to stay afloat, capacity building and skills training, targeted assistance, and the provision of market linkages. Respondents expressed a lack of institutional support in their entrepreneurial venture. They expressed an interest in formal partnership with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. They require assistance in product marketing and expressed a desire to be hosted on the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site website but all their pursuits in this regard have been to no avail.

Conclusion

The mandate and main thrust of the study was to profile the Great Zimbabwe Craft center entrepreneurship venture. The study concluded that most craft entrepreneurs at Great Zimbabwe craft centre engage in their activities as just a livelihood diversification strategy to supplement other sources of income.

These entrepreneurs mostly use non sophisticated business strategies, operate mostly at subsistence level, unidentifiable, with limited specialisation working from

hand to mouth, and prefer to work under the carpet or off the books.

These conclusions align toward the survival oriented type of entrepreneurs. The study also concluded that institutional support is pivotal to the success of the craft entrepreneurship at Great Zimbabwe craft centre.

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