

Telling Stories and Sustaining Heritage: The Case of Local Artisans in the Paete Heritage Crafts Route in Paete Laguna, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Telling Stories, Audience Engagement, and Sustaining Heritage: The Case of Local Artisans in the Paete Heritage Crafts Route in Paete Laguna, Philippines

KEYWORDS: Cultural Sustainability, Adaptive Conservation, Heritage Sustainability, Rural Regeneration; Sustainable Development; Audience-based Heritage Interpretation; Cultural Heritage Tourism

Millions of artisans worldwide lost their jobs while cultural organizations including those of the heritage sector either resized or completely closed down due to the Covid pandemic. In India alone, which boasts of 200 million artisans, 88% of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) shut down in 2020 (Singh, S., 2021). The Philippine heritage sector is no exception. But while it had already suffered serious setbacks that placed it at a grave threat of loss even before the pandemic, it has somehow managed to survive and weave its story through even during these uncertain times.

This study explores the potentials of the adaptive approach to cultural heritage interpretation in the field of conservation in relation to rural regeneration and cultural sustainability by examining the case of the artisan heritage crafts route/trail in the small rural locale of Paete in the Philippines. It problematizes the trails' interpretive content and praxis from the perspective of visitor engagement using the case study approach to determine the effectiveness of the meaning-making experience of both audiences and artisans as actors in heritage interpretation according to the following indicators: 1) Visitor satisfaction 2) Knowledge gain 3) Attitude change 4) Modification of behavior intent in relation to the locale's adaptive practices, and examines its impact within the contexts of cultural heritage sustainability and rural regeneration amidst extreme economic losses and disruptions.

This study provides insights on the effectiveness of adaptive practices in heritage interpretation within the field of heritage conservation and describes how it can impact cultural sustainability for rural development and/or growth. In particular, it describes and highlights not only the importance of the meaning-making and interpretive processes in cultural heritage interpretation but also analyzes the role of audiences and artisans being the prime "storytellers" and movers of culture along the path of sustainable development

and as actors and crucial players in cultural heritage conservation for economic development.

Singh, S. (2021) *Reimagining the Craft Economy Post Covid 19, ISSUU*. British Council and Fashion Revolution India.
Available at: https://issuu.com/fashionrevolution/docs/reimagining_the_craft_economy_post_covid-19_report (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

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I. INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study/Background

Paete, a small town in the northeastern part of Laguna province in the Philippines, is renowned for its artisan crafts heritage, particularly in wood carving or *ukit* and papier-mache or *taka* making. With the town's exceptionally skilled artisans and visual artists, it has earned a good reputation for its excellent craftsmanship not just locally but globally, making it an important cultural heritage site in the Philippines (Author, 2017; Fajardo, B., 2015; Office of the President, 2005). The crafts practice in Paete has benefitted woodcarvers in terms of generating income, providing employment opportunities, preserving culture and tradition, and boosting the tourism industry over the years. In recognition of its cultural heritage and economic potential as a tourist destination, former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared the town as the carving capital of the Philippines through Presidential Proclamation 809 (Open University, no date; Office of the President, 2005) in 2005.

However, the Paete community has faced several challenges over the years, including evolving audience preferences and changing market trends, which have had an impact on the production of their crafts. These changes have been attributed to the rise in the availability of inexpensive and mass-produced items in the local and global markets which has led consumers to prioritize affordability over the quality and authenticity of handmade craft products resulting in fluctuations in the demand for such products and consequently, a decrease in the number of artisans devoted to practice (Alab, 2023; UNESCO, 2019), which in turn, affected audience engagement and meaning-making in the site (Fely, 2017; Alab, 2023).

While Paete artisans are skilled and knowledgeable in crafts-making, they have been restricted by their lack of facility with language and digital technology to reach a broader audience, particularly the young, who have become increasingly exposed to more contemporary trends through digital platforms. As younger audiences become increasingly drawn to innovation and new ideas, the more difficult it has become for artisans to make their stories accessible to them who, with their strong digital presence and heavy use of

technology, have mostly relied on digital platforms and the social media for content consumption (Alab, 2023; Gabriel, 2023; Pedro, 2023).

Adding to all these is the ecological imbalance in the Sierra Madre mountain range. The *Sierra Madre*, where the town of Paete is situated, has suffered greatly from deforestation, illegal logging, and mining in recent years, and is now facing a great environmental crisis. Originally known for its biodiversity and as an important watershed for the region, it has faced serious challenges because of soil erosion, landslides, and loss of habitat for wildlife that have continued to tip the balance of its ecological system (Bicker, 2023; Forest Foundation, Philippines, n.d.). With the depletion of forests and illegal logging and the imposition of a log ban implemented, the availability of materials most suitable for carving such as *batikuling* (*Litsea leytensis*) wood to Paete artisans has become scarce. To bridge their production, Paete carvers have resorted to using alternative wood options such as *santol*, *marang*, *acacia*, or *narra*, among others, or completely shifted to new mediums like vegetables or fruits, or ice, affecting the quality and form of their work and the course of crafts production. Moreover, as wood becomes scarce, its cost has increased through the years, making it doubly difficult for woodcarvers to procure materials to create and sustain production, hence disrupting audience engagement and meaning-making (Alab, 2023; Bicker, 2023; Fely, 2015; Eduardo, 2015; Manila Bulletin Agriculture, 2023).

While the local government of Paete has developed policies and implemented programs to support Paete wood carvers, such as training and skills development through workshops, competitions, and exhibits, education, infrastructure development, and tourism, as well as forging partnerships with institutions to address the scarcity of wood supply for the carvers in the locale (Manila Bulletin Agriculture, 2023) many of the Paete artisans still perceive that their long-term needs have not been fully met. These include their needs for access to markets, financial or funding support in the form of capital, and business development or needs through capacity building and skills development related to sustaining their crafts (Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023; Elena, 2023). Paete carvers also need help with bureaucratic procedures, inadequate information and coordination, and limited resources and budget (Pedro, 2023). Despite the government's reasonable efforts, there remains a lack of attention given to addressing the long-term needs of the artisans in terms of capacity

building related to improving production and engagement with their audiences (Aman, 2023).

These wicked problems have been compounded by the COVID-19 life-threatening problems which have created a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) context for the Paete artisans. As Covid restrictions, health protocols, and public health guidelines constantly changed during the peak of the pandemic, production was suspended or pushed to a halt affecting most severely those who lacked capital and without a steady clientele, such as those who work as apprentices or assist master carvers (Elena, 2023; Pedro, 2023) It has created uncertainty and fears around the future of the craft trail without knowing if they could resume their activities and how long they could adapt to the changing and difficult circumstances brought by the pandemic. The pandemic has also brought new complex challenges for artisans as they faced health and safety risks which have had a significant impact, particularly on those who rely solely on crafts making as their source of income (Alab, 2023).

Stories and Storytelling

The interpretive practice of storytelling in the town of Paete has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years without a specific plan or program. Unlike many modern forms of storytelling, it has adapted and evolved according to the artisans' and audiences' needs and circumstances. As it constantly evolves as it adapts, its praxis and content cannot be easily categorized (Teresa, 2023).

While it is common practice that a guide would follow a predetermined tour script in a cultural route with the aim to provide audiences with a structured and informative experience according to a cultural route's interpretive plan, the storytelling in the Paete crafts trail is primarily guided and shaped by what audiences prefer or like (Alab,2023; Eduardo, 2018, Teresa, 2023).

Moreover, as it is adaptive and constantly change according to the needs of audiences (Aman, 2023; Lalaine, 2023) and tend to focus on the economic aspect of the crafts, e.g. as livelihood (Elena, 2023; Gabriel, 2023; Lalaine, 2023; Teresa, 2023;), their modes of delivery and structure, and to some degree, in content according to the needs of audiences vary, making them unique without following any specific shape or trajectory every time they are told (Teresa, 2023).

This study aims therefore to investigate the effectiveness and potential implications of the adaptive storytelling practices by Paete crafts artisans in engaging audiences and sustaining the local crafts heritage trail in Paete, Laguna, Philippines. The study focuses on exploring how artisans employ interpretive approaches from the viewpoint of audiences and their experiences, with the goal of preserving and sustaining the Paete crafts heritage trail.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Studies on storytelling focus to examine how stories convey cultural values and beliefs (Jenkins, 2021), and while these provide valuable insights, they do not always capture the evolving and adaptive nature of storytelling from the domain of heritage interpretation to examine how the experience of the visitor can create an impact on cultural sustainability.

The fact that storytelling in the small locale of Paete has endured for centuries without a specific plan or program implies its inherent adaptability to the needs and wants of the visitor. It not only argues the idea that cultural traditions are static and immutable but also explores the role and significance of artisans and audiences as key actors in sustaining their crafts heritage.

Moreover, this case study explores the application of adaptive storytelling as an interpretive approach to heritage sites/heritage tourism sites, aiming to uncover its tangible and practical benefits beyond the mere transmission of cultural beliefs and values. It explores the

economic potential of adaptive storytelling within the purview of cultural sustainability, specifically in a rural setting.

This study therefore bridges gaps in the literature on the potential of adaptive storytelling as an interpretive approach by exploring a case where storytelling by artisans meet the needs of the audiences or visitors and its relation to cultural sustainability. The findings of this study can therefore provide insights into the potential of adaptive storytelling to inform the development of measures and strategies for heritage interpretation in relation to audience engagement to determine implications for sustainability of crafts trails/routes in particular in a rural context, and in general terms, to contribute to the discussion of culture as one of the four pillars of sustainable development.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study aims to answer the following question:

To what extent does the adaptive storytelling by artisans impact on audience engagement in the sustainability of Paete crafts heritage trail/route?

Objectives: The study aims

1. to investigate the potential benefit of adaptive storytelling by artisans as an approach to sustaining the Paete heritage trail/route
2. to determine how adaptive storytelling affects audience engagement by examining the extent to which it influences satisfaction, knowledge gain, attitude change, and behavioral modification as indicators of their experience
3. To determine the linkage between audience engagement and sustainability of the Paete heritage trail/route

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling and its Cultural Significance

Human culture is couched in human language (Konner, 2010) and one of the ways in which culture is communicated and shared within a community is through storytelling. Storytelling as a powerful medium serves to communicate, interpret and make sense of diverse human experiences in different environments (Abdul-Malik, Moonsammy and Saltman, 2012; Bassano et al., 2019; Beevor, Campos and Guerreiro, 2022; Federation of European Storytelling, 2019; Gottshcall, 2012; Jenkins, 2021; Judd, 2022; Konner, 2010; Moscardo 2020).

Traditionally, storytelling serves to transmit wisdom, beliefs and values, make sense of past experiences, encourage personal and communal reflection and foster a sense of shared experience. In contemporary society its role has expanded to become an effective communication tool in institutions and professional fields (Lwin, 2012, MacDonald, 1999). As a form of communication, it mediates between a storyteller and audiences for meaning-making (Federation of European Storytelling, 2019; Hooper-Greenhil, 1994; Jenkins, 2021).

Storytelling: as Interpretation and Communication in Heritage Contexts

Eilean Hooper-Greenhil (1994) articulates the idea of storytelling as a form of communication in the museum context by making a connection between meaning-making and interpretation and visitor experience: 'The process of meaning-making is the process of making sense of experience, of explaining or interpreting the world to ourselves and others ... 'The making of meaning, the construction of understanding, is reached through the process of interpretation' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994:12; Nielsen, 2017). She suggests that storytelling as interpretation is a communication process that essentially consists in the making of meaning through the experience with the visitor (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

Moreover, studies suggest that interpretation in museums is a complex process. One of the biggest challenges of museums today for example, has been in fact, the recent shift in focus in the processes of communication and interpretation. Whereas museum communication used to be viewed as linear or one-way directed where an author, i.e., a museum or gallery curator or heritage professional holds and transmits the message to a passive audience (Mason, 2005) in the past, museum communication these days seems to be more 'transactional' where audiences are given more opportunities to contribute to discussion, interaction, exchange, and to the meaning-making process (Hopper-Greenhill, 2004). Hooper-Greenhill (2004) has noted this shift as early as the 1950's as audiences have become more diverse and responsive to all sorts of media.

Storytelling as an interpretive and communicative tool (Roque, 2022) provides a platform where diverse audiences can come together and participate in the telling, remembering and retelling of stories as their own in theater (Babbage, 2015), and is critical part of the inherent dynamics of exchange in other heritage sites such as cultural routes (ICOMOS, 2008; Castellano, 2023; Durusoy, 2014).

Furthermore, studies suggest that cultural heritage interpretation through storytelling goes beyond communicating messages (The Heritage Fund; 2021) as it involves designing experiences to engage the visitor (Association for Heritage Interpretation, 2019; Interpretation Australia, n.d.; Moscardo, 2014; Nowacki, 2021; Tilden, 1957; 1977). Freeman Tilden, one of the pioneers of heritage interpretation used the concepts of natural parks in connection with their preservation to define interpretation as "*An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.*" (Tilden, 1957; 1977) Per Tilden, interpretation essentially consists in conveying the beauty, wonder, inspiration and spiritual significance of a site with respect to how the audience's experiences play a role in the meaning-making process (Tilden, 1957, 1977).

In his six principles of heritage interpretation, Tilden (1957) relates interpretation as meaning-making with the visitor which can be summarized into 3 principles: 1) interpretation should provoke or arouse the interest and curiosity of the visitors 2)

Interpretation should relate to daily life and experiences of the visitors 3) interpretation must reveal unforgettable content to visitors by addressing a program of theme (Nowacki, 2021; Tilden , 1957;1977)

On one hand, a study on audience development conducted by the Heritage Lottery Funds underlines the importance of taking people to center stage in the interpretive process, suggesting that to develop audiences, it is important to understand what the market actually wants (2010), and to create for them direct and indirect access at different levels, i.e., physical, intellectual and emotional access (Davies, 2017). This is crucial to build strong relationships across a broad spectrum of audiences, and for the worthwhile participation and meaningful engagement by audiences (Heritage Lottery Funds, 2010).

Studies have also shown that effectiveness of interpretation in relation to meaning-making can be assessed according to interpretive goals from the point of view of visitor experience with the following indicators:

- 1) Visitor satisfaction
- 2) Knowledge gain
- 3) Attitude change and
- 4) Behavior change (Roberts et. al., 2014)

Furthermore, an essential factor in determining the effectiveness of interpretation is “the work of creating understanding on the part of the visitor (Beck and Cable, 2011: xxi; Tilden, 1968) which consists in establishing a relationship between the elements of a heritage site, and on one hand, the personal meaning-making of the visitor. This, according to Tilden, is within the context of ‘interesting and enjoyable service’ (Tilkin, nd: 7). Furthermore, a good or effective interpretation consists in an enjoyable experience which facilitates learning. It involves audiences who can relate to content to their personal knowledge, interests, feelings and values, as they discover by engaging their senses and their sense of recreation (Knapp and Benton, 2014). This is compatible with the definition that interpretation is a communication process that “forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meaning of the resource” (Brochu and Merriman, 2002:14).

Accordingly, literature shows that trails as a flexible heritage-based tourism can provide more rewarding experiences for audiences as they can incorporate both tangible and intangible features of heritage through story-telling. As experiential events, inherent in them is 'the idea of embodiment' (MacLeod, 2017: 427) i.e., the engagement of the sense of sight, touch, smell, taste and sense of hearing. Noting the scent of flowers, the body's movements, the sounds of the city, and the taste of food can enhance a visitor's initial experience of heritage (MacLeod, 2017), and spur him/her to come back to the trail link or route site repeatedly.

The Adaptive Function of Storytelling in Heritage Sites

According to research by Bietti, Tillston, and Bengertter (2018) and Brown (1991), storytelling possesses a universal quality (Judd, 2022) that contributes to its adaptive function. This adaptation can be attributed to many factors. One idea is that storytelling has developed as a way to make sense of new and unusual situations which enables to form shared memorable experiences (Alfreds, 2013; Bietti Tilston, and Bengertter, 2018). Adaptive storytelling involves the shaping of stories to make them relevant and engaging for the present audience (Bietti, Tilston and Bangerter, 2018).

In theater, Mike Alfreds (2013) reflects the role of actors in storytelling and its adaptive function by making a clear distinction between play acting and storytelling. Playacting refers to the actor's performance to bring a play to life on stage within the confines of the play's predetermined, structure, such as scenes of dialogue, locations and duration while storytelling involves the performance of narrative material such as novels where actors become storytellers themselves by embodying the story and delivering it in different ways. In storytelling, actors not only act out the roles but also deliver the story through a special set of techniques that allows them to adapt as storytelling has no constraints in terms of length, language, space and time. This allows new conventions and forms when the actor possesses the ability to step outside the enacted story and discuss the narrative with the audience (The Play Ground, 2013; Alfreds, 2013), hence creating immersive and more meaningful experiences with the audience. In theater, adaptive storytelling allows direct

engagement with the audience and encourages to meet the expectations of audiences (Alfreds, 2013; Babbage, 2015).

Babbage (2015) suggests that the essence of storytelling is adaptability as it builds upon tradition while translating and reshaping stories to make them relevant in the present. In an era of rapid and constant change, this is crucial (Babbage, 2015). Success in storytelling within the context of the heritage context relies heavily on how the stories are adapted in the process of storytelling according to the needs of audiences.

Opportunities for Sustainability through Storytelling

Storytelling and the Role of Cultural Routes and Craft Trails

Heritage attractions and museums are facing the challenge to adapt to the expectations of experience-seeking tourists and to prioritize meaning-making through memorable experiences. Storytelling as a co-creative tool can be employed to enhance the engagement and experience of the visitor and generate memorable experiences (Beevor, Campos and Guerreiro, 2022; Grogga-Bada and Larrouquet, 2020; Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

In 2008, The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter on Cultural Routes expanded the understanding of routes to the domain of communication and redefined it based on several criteria including the context, content, cross-cultural importance, the dynamic nature or character of the cultural route, and the setting of the route (Durusoy, 2014):

“Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality which must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, and knowledge and values between peoples, countries, religious or continents over significant periods of time, have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage

and have integrated into a dynamic system the historic relations and cultural properties associated with its existence.” (ICOMOS, 2008).

Alongside this expanded definition a change in their temporal scope and itineraries was introduced. Essentially, cultural routes were transformed from communicating historical facts to becoming platforms representing [European] heritage that contributes to regional and local development as defined by the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR). It supports the idea that a cultural route must involve an itinerary or a series of itineraries that revolve around a specific theme which should serve as a foundation for long-term research projects and sustainable development efforts, among others (ICOMOS, 2008; Castellano, 2023; Durusoy, 2014; The Getty Conservation Institute, 2009).

Moreover, literature suggests that crafts trails as tourism-based heritage could lead to the clustering of activities and other attractions which could spur the development of other tourism sites in a rural setting. They can provide opportunities to stimulate cooperation and partnerships between local areas as well as a meaningful or engagement by the community with the public sector, and hence, push for increased opportunities for the development of communities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Along this line, Dümcke and Gnedovsky (2013) suggest that it is important in ‘enhancing social inclusion, developing intercultural dialogue, and shaping the identity of a given territory, improving the quality of the environment, creating jobs and enhancing the investment climate’ while (Fernández Bellver et al. (2023) suggest that it is crucial in fostering global activities which is essential in promoting innovation that benefits rural communities, and in building the visitor economy (Childs 2015).

Moreover, cultural routes show rapid growth as a segment of the tourism industry globally. It has contributed to stimulate economic growth and promoted sustainable development as it can result in job creation, and regeneration of both rural and urban areas and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage particularly in developing countries. As part of the evolving sector of cultural tourism, it has encompassed greater political, economic, social, educational and ecological dimensions (UNESCO, 2022; UNWTO, 2019).

However, In the recent years, due to the covid 19 crisis, it has faced far greater challenges driven by digital advancements related to adapting its workforce in terms of legislation and regulations pertaining to employment, innovation, entrepreneurship, and adoption of new business models including low level of technological know-how and trends, insufficient funding to acquire new technologies and provide training, and lack of cooperation and communication among stakeholders (UNWTO, 2019).

Economic Potential of Traditional Cultural Expressions in the Creative Sector

On one hand, the creative industries have emerged as a significant contributor to the creative sector and the overall national economy in Southeast Asia. Craft production has become the backbone of rural economies supporting a large number of people working in the non-formal sectors (UNCTAD (2010; 2018; 2022). Sustaining the livelihoods of craft artisans while promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity and preserving their cultural traditions and identities for human development, it has enabled rural communities to derive economic benefits from the crafts industry and hence, plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable and sustainable development in the region (Future Learn, 2022, UNCTAD, 2010; 2018; 2022).

In a case study, Terry (2017) reports that the craft industry has an overall positive overall economic, financial and cultural impact on individuals, households and the nation as a whole. It reveals that it benefits rural residents, individuals with limited education, and marginalized groups primarily in terms of their well-being and development as a community. However, on the national level, while the non-craft sector generates higher overall income compared to the craft sector, it is the non-craft sector that demonstrates greater economic efficiency despite the non-craft sector's higher profitability. Overall, the craft advantages producers and businesses in rural areas more than those in urban areas, especially when they have access to purchases by formal organizations and tourists (Terry, 2017).

In a recent study conducted by Kantar Republic (2021) for the National Arts Council Singapore (on the consumption of Digital Arts during Covid-19, online arts consumption increased briefly the end of 2020 but dipped again during the last phase of the pandemic (Phase 3 of the pandemic when live performances could already seat up to 250 people) with cultural heritage at the lowest share with 14% in proportions of audiences who have

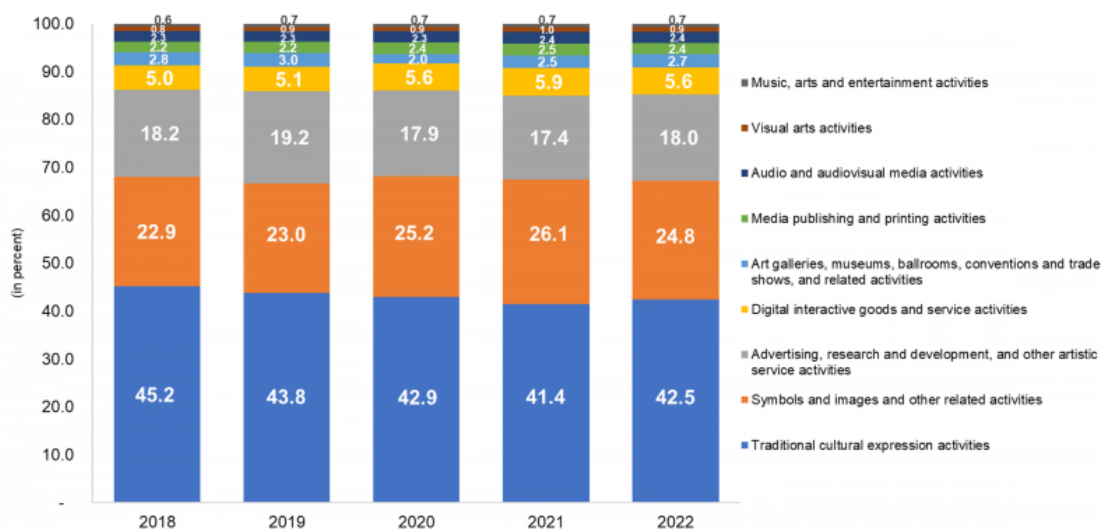
consumed digital arts content during the last phase. Whereas the crafts sector fared at 37% in proportion of audiences who have consumed digital arts content during the last phase of the pandemic (Kantar Republic, 2021). Per another study, it reports that there are 5 macro trends to watch in the arts sector in the crafts and heritage sectors in the post-pandemic normal as follows:

- 1) Arts Made Accessible : digital media have expanded the accessibility and availability of art through the internet and online platforms and promoted greater inclusivity
- 2) Arts For a Cause: the younger generation has looked into the arts as a powerful tool to express themselves to convey their thoughts and beliefs and experiences and to rally and drive social change
- 3) Asian Cultural Wave : digital technologies have started to become integral to Asian media and play a dominant role in shaping new art forms, content and audience engagement
- 4) Delinearization of the Arts: direct-to consumer platforms have allowed artists to even self-taught amateurs to thrive without the middle person
- 5) Art as Life Style: consumers and audiences are warming to virtual world as places to express themselves and interact with others (Kantar Republic, 2022)

On one hand, the creative industries in the Philippines have generated employment for 6.8 million Filipinos between 2018-2022 according to the 2023 report by the Philippine Statistics Office based on the compilation of the Philippine Creative Economy Satellite Accounts (PCESA) with traditional cultural expression activities including crafts-making and cultural heritage-related activities accounting for the largest share of employment at 42.5% in 2022 (Fig. 1). Despite the high employment numbers, however, the economic impact of traditional cultural expression activities is relatively small. The Gross Value Added (GVA) of these activities accounted for only 3.2% of the total GVA of the creative industries in 2022 (Table 1). This indicates that there is a limited demand in the market or limited commercial viability for the products they create despite the considerable amount of labor dedicated to traditional cultural activities. Although traditional cultural expression activities such as crafts/crafts-making contribute to a significant portion of employment within the creative industries, they have a relatively small impact on the overall economic output. This

suggests that there may be insufficient market demand or limited commercial potential for traditional expression products, despite the skilled labor in the sector in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023).

Fig. 1 Percent Share of Employment in the Creative Economy in the Philippines by Industry, 2018 to 2022 (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2023)



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

Table 1. Gross Value Added of Creative Economy at Current Prices, 2018-2022

Percent share to total (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023)

Gross Value Added of Creative Economy at Current Prices, 2018-2022					
Percent share to total (in percent)					
Industry	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Audio and audiovisual media activities	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Digital interactive goods and service activities	19.4	19.7	20.2	20.0	20.3
Advertising, research and development, and other artistic service activities	19.8	20.1	19.8	20.0	20.8
Symbols and images and other related activities	34.1	33.9	33.7	33.5	32.9
Media publishing and printing activities	11.5	11.2	11.3	11.3	11.2
Music, arts and entertainment activities	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Visual arts activities	7.3	7.2	7.2	7.2	6.8
Traditional cultural expression activities	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.2
Art galleries, museums, ballrooms, conventions and trade shows, and related activities	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total Gross Value Added of Creative Economy	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

However, existing literature suggests that crafts trails as tourism-based heritage could lead to the clustering of activities and other attractions which could spur the development of other tourism sites in a rural setting. They can provide opportunities to stimulate cooperation and partnerships between local areas as well as a meaningful or engagement by the community with the public sector, and hence, push for increased opportunities for the development of communities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Along this line, Dümcke and Gnedovsky (2013) suggest that cultural heritage is important in 'enhancing social inclusion, developing intercultural dialogue, and shaping the identity of a given territory, improving the quality of the environment, creating jobs and enhancing the investment climate' while (Fernández Bellver et al. (2023) suggest that it is crucial in fostering global activities which is essential in promoting innovation that benefits rural communities, and in building the visitor economy (Childs 2015).

Storytelling and the Experience Economy: Enhancing Customer Engagement and Sustainable growth

The term experience economy refers to a new way of consuming goods and services (Toffler, 1970). It originates from Alvin Toffler's book "Future Shock" which suggests that as societies become more technologically advanced, there will be a transition from producing physical goods to providing services (Murray, 2018; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2013; Toffler, 1970). Pine and Gilmore (1998) popularized this concept into what we now call the "experience economy " (Murray, 2018) suggesting that experiences as an economic value is distinct from services as an economic offering in terms of their nature and propositions to customers (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2013). While services are intangible and focused on delivering a specific outcome or solving a problem for a customer, for example, experiences create memories and engage customers on different levels: emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual. Experiences in businesses are designed and staged to engage individual customers with services to provide a holistic environment where customers actively participate and co-create the experience. They can involve storytelling, thematic elements and the use of positive visual and auditory cues to enhance its impact to leave a lasting impression and sense of connection, personal transformation and enjoyment on the part of the customer (Groga-Bada and Larrouquet, 2020; Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

Moreover, in a case, study Osmond, Chen and Pearce (2015) integrated Pine and Gilmore's concept of experience and Schmitt's categorizations of experience as a framework to better understand visitor experience in tourism and found that aesthetic and sensory experiences were most important to the experience of the visitor, and that visual and graphical representations such as photographs may be employed to gain a deeper understanding of their experience using the integrated framework (Osmond, Chen and Pearce, 2015).

In another survey, companies believed that they were providing excellent customer experiences but most customers disagreed. The authors propose a customer experience management (CEM) process that involves monitoring experiences patterns involving 1) past patterns of experiences by evaluating completed transactions 2) present patterns of experiences tracking current relationships and 3) potential patterns conducting inquiries to uncover future opportunities (Schwager and Meyer, 2007).

Moreover, a recent study suggests that the MTV generation (Gen X) and centennials (Gen Z), find the highest satisfaction and happiness in sharing and staging stories, images and videos with friends through online networks as they value the exchange of and sharing them through online networks (Euajarusphan, 2021) to satisfy human needs such as play, community, personalization, authenticity. This is significant considering that their spending habits are influential in shaping the overall trends and patterns within the experience economy (Marketing 360, 2019; Yaffe, Moose and Marquardt, 2019). People want to have more experience and businesses are adapting to meet this demand (d'Entremont, 2020; Eventbrite, 2014; Yaffe, Moose and Marquard, 2019).

Moreover, Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest that staging experiences can be transformative. This means that staging immersive and memorable experiences can foster personal and cultural changes. Stories play a crucial role in the process as they are a powerful tool to communicate and interpret human experiences enabling positive change personal and societal levels (Dickenson, n.d.; (Saltmarshe, 2018).

Storytelling can be a powerful tool to communicate and interpret personal and human experiences and foster audience engagement in different contexts as it has the capacity to

adapt to the personal needs and experiences of audiences. Hence, storytelling can create conditions for positive change at the level of individuals and communities and societies within the domain of culture and hence has a potential to support sustainability to contribute to the betterment of individuals, communities and societies as a whole.

V. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a qualitative case study employing a mixed method approach incorporating data from desk-research, semi-structured interviews and survey using purposive sampling. The research aims to explore the adaptive storytelling practiced by artisans within the crafts heritage trail of Paete in Laguna, Philippines. It focuses on the relationship between the storytelling by artisans, audience engagement in relation to the sustainability of the site.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling for the interviews with artisans and audiences who have gone or experienced the Paete crafts trail. It involved targeting individuals who had experienced the crafts heritage trail in Paete from the author's friends list on Messenger and Facebook and through Arts Studies Department of the University of the Philippines whose faculty, staff and students would go to Paete for educational field trips. On one end, the Paete artisan participants were selected randomly from a pool of artists, carvers and artisans from the Paete Artist Guild and through recommendations by the artisans themselves during the interviews. The artisan participants in this study include master carvers, sculptors, and *peinture* (painting-sculpture) makers who consider themselves artists. Many of whom operate galleries and workshops where they employ workers and apprentices who are involved in mass producing crafts. Additionally, the study involves interviews with academics and researchers who have done systematic studies on Paete and its artists and other members of the academic community,

gallery owners in Paete, a crafts store owner and agent in a Paete, and a supplier of Paete crafts merchandise who were chosen for direct experience and engagement either in the study and interpretation, production, sale of the crafts heritage products in Paete and in dealing with the Paete crafts artisans being key stakeholders.

Data Collection Methods

To achieve the aims of this study, data was collected through surveys, desk-based research and semi-structured interviews. These methods were employed to gather information on the practices, experiences and perspectives on storytelling by artisans and audience experiences as visitors and gather background data and information for analysis on storytelling and visitor engagement in relation to sustainability.

The surveys were distributed via a survey link sent through Messenger and email to targeted audiences to gather qualitative data on their demographics and experiences of the storytelling of artisans in the Paete crafts heritage trail. The survey was designed to elicit information on the nature of meaning-making in the Paete trail in terms of the storytelling by artisans, their different modes and techniques of storytelling, and the effects of these practices on the audience in terms of the following engagement indicators: 1) Visitor satisfaction 2) Knowledge gain 3) Attitude change (Roberts et. al., 2014).

Desk-based research involved a review of literature, including books and journals, infographics, and case studies related to adaptive storytelling as an interpretive tool and audience engagement in the context of crafts heritage and sustainability.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of artisans and audience members who had been identified as key informants. These interviews were Zoom-recorded, and the data were analyzed using a thematic approach. The interviews included semi-structured and open-ended questions to explore 1) the nature of adaptive storytelling practices by Paete crafts artisans 2) the strategies used to engage audiences by

them, and 3) the challenges faced by artisans, including 4) the impact of these practices on the preservation and transmission and sustainability of the crafts heritage trail.

The qualitative questions for the interviews with artisans can be clustered into themes related to their storytelling practices as follows:

1. Artisans' role and experience in storytelling
2. Storytelling techniques and audience engagement
3. Challenges and strategies in storytelling
4. Impact and feedback of storytelling practices (See

[Interview Questions for Artisans](#))

The qualitative data collected from the surveys, desk-based research, and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using a rigorous approach to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. A triangulation method was employed, which involved comparing and cross-referencing the data from multiple sources to analyze and identify the patterns, themes, and relationships in the data, as well as examining the extent to which the findings supported the hypothesis of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The participants to this study were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, and the procedures, benefits involved as well as the measures to ensure the confidentiality of the data to be provided by the respondents. The participants were ensured that their identity will be kept confidential and not shared without explicit permission. It was pointed out to the participants that their participation was on a voluntary basis and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Adequate measures were also taken to ensure that the integrity of the data that have been collected were kept using a secured online platform for the surveys.

Data Analysis

A qualitative research approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from artisans. The interviews were conducted via Zoom or Messenger Chat. A survey via Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. It involved several stages including familiarization, coding and theme generation and refinement.

Scope and Limitations

This study is confined to the adapted storytelling by artisans in the Paete community and focused on possible implications of storytelling as an interpretive tool to establish conditions for cultural sustainability. It does not cover other factors that may influence the sustainability of the heritage crafts trail. The survey respondents are limited to 61 adult Filipinos aged 20 and above who have visited the trail and do not include the younger population or audiences of the trail. Due to budget constraints, the author had to rely on online interviews and surveys conducted online. Because of the limitation in scope, the findings of this study may not be applied to a larger context as it focuses only on a specific or particular group of the Paete carvers or artisans in the Paete community. The data collection also has limitations in terms of access to primary sources and is focused on those with whom the author has some form of connection online, and hence a potential bias in participant selection. The interviews with key informants have been recorded but due to time and budget constraints have not been transcribed verbatim at the time of writing.

Sampling Procedure

This study employed purposive and snowball sampling to survey audiences and interview craft artisans, academics, researchers, Paete craft exporters, gallery owners and craft storekeepers who have visited the Paete route or trail.

Craft Artisans who were active members of the Paete Artist guild and with substantial knowledge and experience in crafts-making, particularly carving, were selected for the

interviews. The artisans who were interviewed were chosen based on their expertise, knowledge and involvement in the craft-making process and recommendations from other artisans members of the Paete Artist Guild, ensuring a diverse representation of artisans carvers. Other stakeholders, academics and researchers who have conducted and published studies on Paete and its folk art production (carving and taka-making) and a crafts store keeper who worked as a middle person for artisans were also interviewed based on their expertise, knowledge and engagement with Paete artisans and audiences of the Paete crafts trail. They were chosen from the Friends list of the author in Facebook and Messenger and through the recommendations of the Paete Artist Guild president and stakeholders.

In order to understand the perspectives and experiences of the audience, a survey via Google forms was conducted. A purposive snowball sampling method was used, where individuals who visited the Paete crafts heritage trail were approached online via email or Messenger to participate in the survey. The respondents were also invited to participate through an email invitation coursed through the Arts Studies Department in the University of the Philippines Diliman whose faculty and students have gone to Paete in the past for their educational field trips. Questions related to audience engagement through the storytelling of artisans in the Paete crafts trail were asked using the following indicators 1) Visitor satisfaction 2) Knowledge gain 3) Attitude change and 4) Behavior change (Roberts et. al., 2014), as well as on the stories and values of the crafts based on their experience of the trail.

By employing interviews, desk-based research, and surveys with audiences, a broad understanding of the audience engagement through storytelling and its implications for sustainability in the Paete crafts heritage trail was obtained.

VI.THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding Artisan Storytelling in Paete: Enhancing Audience Engagement and Sustainability

Cultural products such as art, literature or traditions are a result of accumulated efforts by different individuals in the process of creation. Hence, when people encounter products of culture, their experience is shaped by transmissions from direct or indirect mediations, which allow cultural products to form part of a broader culture by being transmitted continuously through new mediations (Banus, et. al, 2013).

This case study focuses to explore the mediating role of storytelling by artisans and its impact on audience engagement for sustainability. Artisans play a crucial role in preserving and contributing to sustainable development because of their skills and traditional knowledge. Through storytelling, they have the power to mediate when they convey the stories behind their craft and engage audiences, which can promote a sense of appreciation and understanding for their crafts to influence sustainable practices. While the positive influence of artisan storytelling is hypothesized, it is important that it is examined and substantiated to understand how it can lead to audience engagement for sustainability.

This study also reflects a concept of sustainability that is anchored on the development of the individual person which promotes the idea that “There can be no sustainable development without integral human development” (Villegas, 2016). The idea of Integral human development recognizes the primacy of the dignity of the person in the context of the common good as well as the various dimensions of the human person in relation to the society as a whole. It highlights the idea that sustainable development should be beneficial to the community or society as whole through the initiatives of individuals, communities and future generations (Villegas 2016). This is along the lines of integral human development within the framework of *Laudato Si* which is a comprehensive approach to the well-being of a person that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings (Pope Francis, 2015).

Drawing from these concepts, this study posits that adaptive storytelling as a communicative and interpretive tool can have a significant impact on audience engagement, which in turn can contribute to the sustainability of the crafts heritage trail in Paete. The framework suggests that by adapting their storytelling techniques and content to the needs and interests of visitors, artisans can effectively as mediators convey the cultural significance of the trail and enhance visitors' engagement. This, in turn, can lead to a greater appreciation of the heritage site and a greater likelihood of supporting its sustainability and conservation.

On one hand, interpretation in the context of heritage is essentially “a communication act” (ICOMOS 2008), that is, the transmission of and meaning-making of heritage values. By communicating to people the significance and connotations of cultural heritage through activities and interpretive information (ICOMOS 2008), audiences can have a better understanding and enjoyment of heritage sites. Storytelling by artisans as an interpretive tool can enhance visitors' engagement in terms of their experience and understanding and in fostering positive attitudes which are necessary for the survival and sustainability of heritage sites (ICOMOS 2022).

Audience engagement refers to the active participation of visitors in the interpretive process, which can result in a deeper understanding and appreciation of the heritage site. In this study, audience engagement is measured using indicators such as visitor satisfaction, knowledge gain, attitude change, and modification of behavior intent. Determining the effectiveness of the meaning-making experience of both visitors and artisans as actors as storytellers in the Paete crafts heritage trail can be done by evaluating visitor satisfaction, knowledge gain, attitude change, and modification of behavior intent in relation to the locale's adaptive practices.

VII. FINDINGS

Adaptive storytelling by artisans

Findings from Interviews with Key Stakeholders

Economic Benefits

According to the qualitative interviews with artisans, storytelling was found to be an important approach for sustaining the Paete heritage crafts trail or route as it provides livelihood opportunities for them (Elena, 2023; Gabriel, 2023; Lalaine, 2023; Pedro, 2023; Teresa, 2023). The artisans expressed that their engagement in crafts-making and storytelling enabled them to support their families, send their children to school (Elena, 2023; Teresa, 2023), and improve their overall quality of life (Aman, 2023; Peter, 2023). The tangible and practical benefits they derive from these practices have served as their primary motivation for their continued involvement in making crafts and interpreting it for their audiences (Aman, 2023; Elena, 2023; Peter, 2023; Teresa 2023).

Cultural Benefits

Pedro (2023) perceived that craft-making or making art is analogous to undertaking a significant endeavor that is akin to crafting a dissertation or a thesis. It has helped him to recognize and practice certain human virtues like perseverance and discipline to continue creating crafts and in the process to develop skills such as problem solving and creativity among others which have empowered him to do better *ukit or carvings*, hence enriching his stories through craftsmanship. However, many artisans feel limited in expanding their reach to wider audiences, especially to the new and younger audiences due to their lack of technical skills and access to digital media, i.e., to “talk” to machines or use AI or the existing popular digital platforms). They find it challenging to cater to the evolving preferences of younger audiences, as traditional storytelling methods and crafts making may not align with the expectations of this demographic (Pedro, 2023; Aman, 2023; Alab,

2023; Gabriel, 2023) According to key informants, engaging in the creation and exhibition of crafts, whether through store displays, galleries or live demonstrations, allow their audiences to develop genuine appreciation and understanding of their craftsmanship and work (Pedro, 2023). This process brings them a great sense of fulfillment while also fostering a sense of personal and community pride and cultivates in them a shared sense of belongingness to the community and collective identity, that is, being “a Paeteño” who knows a deep understanding of aesthetics and beauty and the Paete community’s great tradition of wood carving and crafts-making (Lalaine, 2023; Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023).

On one hand the cultural trail of the town, which is being managed by the local government of Paete, recommends a cultural itinerary in their website consisting mostly of natural and built heritage but leaving out crafts as part of the itinerary (Aman, 2023; Philip 2023). According to interviewee 1, Pablo (2023), the local government of Paete does not have a predetermined or fixed program for local tourism but instead, recommends a list of cultural sites to visit. It does not offer a predetermined interpretive plan (Philip, 2023) indicating that the cultural route is flexible and adaptable. Drawing from the visitors’ interests, a crafts tour route or trail can be made depending on the preference of the visitors (Eduardo, 2018) and as it is flexible, a crafts route can be incorporated as part of an informal route (Philip, 2023) to the official route. A cultural route for a cultural visit would typically include the Church of Paete, the National Altar or the *Pambansang Dambana* the Site of the Three Crosses, the *Matabungca Falls* and *Wawa Park* as prepared by the Municipal Tourism Office (Eduardo 2018). Visits to artisan workshops could likewise be made via a special arrangement for prominent figures or guests. An alternative to this would be a workshop type demonstration in the town plaza upon special arrangements (Eduardo 2018). This provides opportunities and benefits to the artisans on multiple personal levels from honing skills, networking, selling and promoting their crafts and taking pride in their work (Pedro, 2023).

On one hand, Fely (2017), attributed the loss of the crafts tradition in Paete on one hand to the Paete artisans themselves. She said that in the past, the crafts industry in Paete was vibrant and neophyte carvers would work with a master carver to train and develop woodcarving skills. Apparently, everyone was expected to receive training in woodcarving. However, as artisans tried to catch up with the crafts production demands, skills development and training of the next generation was put aside if not neglected. It appears

that production had taken a focused agenda, i.e., to mass produce crafts to meet market demands which has led carvers to decide to leave Paete to pursue another profession in other places (Fely, 2017).

The lack of sufficient material to create crafts such as *Batikuling* wood has also affected the artisan's production of crafts and meaning-making (Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023; Pedro, 2023). Most artisans have diversified their products due to their lack of access to preferred materials for wood. While traditional wood carving and taka making remain at the heart of Paete's heritage crafts, artisans are increasingly diversifying their product offerings to cater to changing market demands (Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023; Pedro, 2023). For example, some artisans are now creating more contemporary designs that blend traditional techniques with modern aesthetics and using alternative materials such as ice, fruits, and vegetables mostly for restaurants (Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023; Pedro, 2023).

The primary distribution channels for Paete heritage crafts have been local and international markets whose own production designers also collaborated with artisans to expand their crafts line by incorporating contemporary designs, hence influencing their products and meaning-making (Isabella, 2018; 2023).

During the height of the covid 19 crisis, however, most artisans had to completely rely on digital platforms to survive which paved the way for changes in the way artisans "stage" and deliver their works to possible clients by bringing them online, hence creating new ways of meaning-making ex. Sending photos or videos of their works to clients via Messenger chat or posting photos of their works in Facebook as status posts (Alab, 2023; Aman, 2023; Elena, 2023; Pedro, 2023). With the rise of e-commerce and social media, artisans are also now able to reach audiences and sell their products directly without middle persons using Facebook and Messenger Chats (Pedro, 2023) and collaborate with other artists and clients for their projects (Aman, 2023).

On one hand, the government's implementation of logging bans to address the environmental crisis in the region, particularly to address the degradation of the *Sierra Mountain* range where carver artisans obtain wood for their crafts, hampers the production and meaningful work of artisan carvers. Despite the good intentions of the government,

most artisans feel that the problem remains unresolved, thereby exacerbating the challenges they face. As wood supply diminishes, the prices of wood escalate, posing even greater difficulty for artisans, especially those with limited capital to begin (Elena, 2023; Pedro, 2023).

Engagement with Audiences

Findings from Survey with Audiences

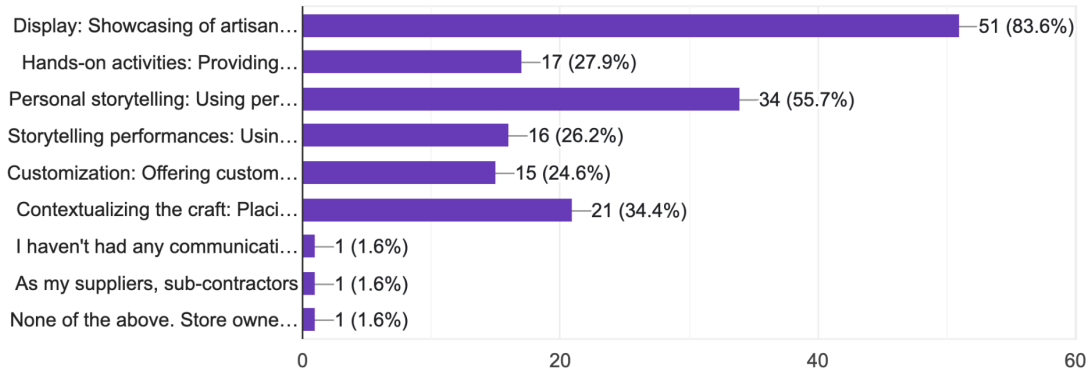
The demographics show that only 1 out of 61 respondents who have gone to the Paete route or trail is a student aged between 15-24 years old. Most of the respondents are aged between 41-56 years which indicates a very low interest on the part of the younger generation who have gone to the trail.

The findings of the purposive sampling, which involved 61 respondents, indicate that the audiences predominantly encountered the storytelling by Paete artisans through intermediary channels such as stores or galleries. The remaining experiences of adaptive storytelling were either directly with the artisans or a combination of direct and indirect interaction by artisans. For example, artisans engaged in contextualizing their crafts which could be done through videos or documentaries or while doing onsite demonstrations. It also indicates that the storytelling practices were highly adaptive. The fact that audiences primarily encountered storytelling by Paete artisans through intermediary channels like stores and the direct and indirect involvement by artisans demonstrate the high adaptability of the artisans storytelling practices. Employing other mediums such as documentaries or videos or conducting demonstrations also indicate the highly adaptive nature of the storytelling practices by Paete artisans (Table 2).

Table 2: Audience experience of Adaptive Storytelling by Artisans in Paete, 2023

2. Which adaptive storytelling by artisans did you experience in the crafts heritage trail of Paete?
Check all that apply you.

61 responses



The survey likewise indicates that among the 61 respondents surveyed, 49 respondents consider the artisan storytelling as aesthetic ex. Looking at displays in galleries or workshops, 43 say it's educational, ex. learning about the challenges artisans face; 24 say it is for entertainment: watching artisans work in their workshops; and 11 say it's escapist or immersive ex. watching a live demo with hand-on participation. It suggests that they have either passive or active participation or engagement in the adaptive storytelling by the artisans.

Their engagement whether passive or active engagement is highly beneficial in the sense that 82% think of the 61 respondents think that they it has increased their understanding and appreciation of the crafts though only 17 say they were satisfied with the storytelling, 30 say they were somewhat satisfied, 12 say, they are neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 2 respondents say they are somewhat dissatisfied.

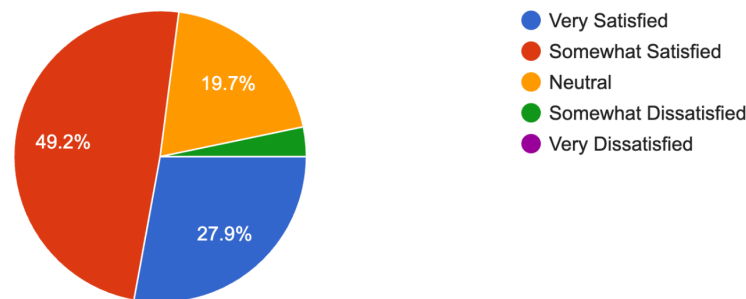
Audience Satisfaction

Based on the results of the survey, there is a range of satisfaction levels among the respondents regarding the knowledge and information they obtained from the storytelling of artisan. There is a significant number of respondents (17 out of 61) who were very satisfied

(27.9%) and a larger group (30 out of 61) who were somewhat satisfied (49.2%). There were also a notable number (12 out of 61) of respondents who were neutral (19.7%) and a small number (2 out of 61) who were somewhat dissatisfied (3.3%). The results suggest that while the adaptive storytelling by artisans at the trail has the potential to be effective in sustaining the trail/route, there is room for improvement when it comes to the satisfaction levels of the audiences when it comes to the knowledge and information the audiences acquired.

7. Based on your experience, how satisfied were you with the storytelling by artisans at the Paete heritage crafts trail in terms of the knowledge and information you acquired?

61 responses

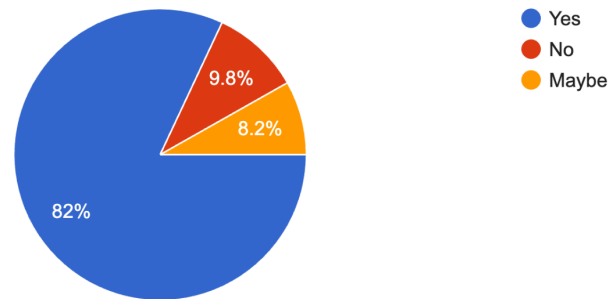


Knowledge Gained by Audiences

55 respondents (82%) say that their perception of the value and importance of the trail changed positively. 4 individuals (8.2%) say "Maybe" and 2 individuals (9.8%) say "No". It indicates some uncertainty or lack of positive change in their perception of the trail's value and importance. Not all respondents have the same level of understanding and perception of the trail's value or importance but overall the majority of the respondents express a positive change in their perception of the trail.

4. Have your interactions with artisans and their adaptive storytelling at the Paete crafts heritage trail increase your understanding or appreciation for their crafts?

61 responses



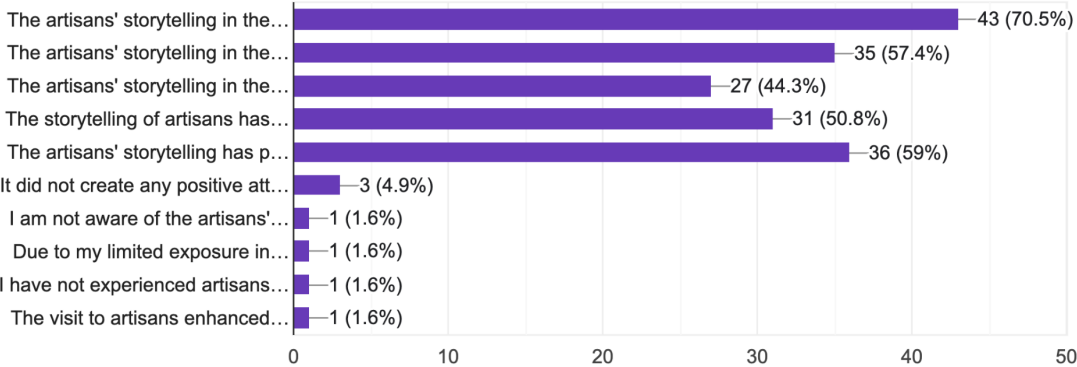
Attitude Change in Audiences

The survey indicates that 43 respondents increased their respect for the cultural significance of the crafts in Paete which suggest that adaptive storytelling effectively conveys the cultural significance and historical importance of the crafts. 35 respondents express a heightened desire to preserve the crafts heritage trail which indicates a sense of ownership and responsibility towards preserving the trail after they have experienced the storytelling of artisans. 27 respondents express a desire to learn more about traditional crafts and heritage indicate that the storytelling has sparked interest in broader respects of crafts and heritage. On one hand, the responses from 3 individuals who did not experience attitude change, one who was not aware of storytelling, one who couldn't say, and one who mentioned enhanced lessons on art and society suggest that the impact of adaptive storytelling may vary among individuals. The majority of respondents express positive outcomes while there are a few who do not experience a notable attitude change or are not aware of the storytelling efforts.

Overall, the data indicates that adaptive storytelling by artisans has the potential to increase respect for the cultural significance of the crafts, foster a desire to preserve the crafts trail and spark curiosity in crafts heritage. These are all positive indicators of the potential benefits of storytelling by artisans in sustaining the Paete crafts heritage trail/route.

8. What other specific changes have you made in terms of your attitude as a result of your visit to the Paete crafts heritage trail and experiencing the artisans' storytelling? Check all that apply to you.

61 responses

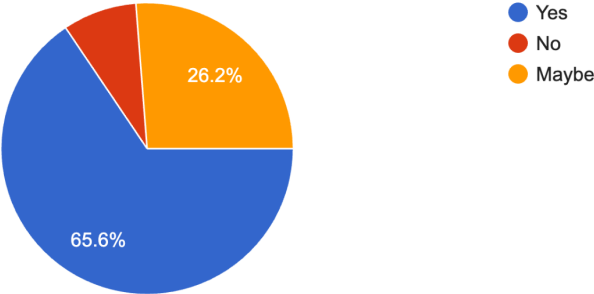


Behavior Change in Audiences

40 respondents say they are willing to pay extra for an experience of the trail that includes adaptive storytelling by artisans, 16 respondents say "Maybe" and 4 respondents say "No". Overall the majority of respondents express a willingness to pay extra for an experience that includes adaptive storytelling by artisans.

11. Would you be willing to pay extra for an experience that includes adaptive storytelling by artisans in the Paete heritage trail?

61 responses



VIII. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS/FINDINGS

This interpretation delves into the findings made in the study of storytelling practiced by artisans along the Paete crafts heritage trail or route focusing on how it relates to audience engagement and its implications for sustainability. By analyzing the data, the author has identified the key factors, and examined their interplay in order to draw insights and conclusions.

Findings and Discussions

Artisan Storytelling

Storytelling is a form of narrative that can be expressed and interpreted to make-meaning of a wide range of human experiences through a variety of creative forms including traditional creative representations such as crafts. It is an interpretive and communicative tool used in different cultural contexts such as cultural heritage e.g., cultural route or site such as the Paete crafts heritage trail or route.

Key themes:

1. The study identifies artisan storytelling as a pivotal factor in shaping audience engagement within the crafts heritage route. Through the qualitative interviews and the survey, it is evident that artisan storytelling, as an interpretive and communicative tool plays a crucial role in the meaning-making of the crafts heritage in Paete along the trails.
2. Artisan storytelling takes many forms, but fundamentally consists in crafts production itself as a tool to express stories. Other forms of artisan storytelling takes a variety of forms of either direct or indirect storytelling e.g. through intermediaries such as galleries or store displays as follows:
 - a. Display: Showcasing of artisan crafts products whether for sale or not in the crafts stores or elsewhere

- b. Hands-on activities: Providing opportunities for visitors to participate in traditional crafts and techniques through hands-on workshops or demonstrations.
- c. Personal storytelling: Using personal stories and experiences of local artisans to help visitors connect with the craft and its significance in the community.
- d. Storytelling performances: Using live performances or demonstrations to showcase the craftsmanship of the artisans and provide an entertaining and engaging experience for visitors.
- e. Customization: Offering customized products or services to visitors, based on their individual preferences or needs.
- f. Contextualizing the craft: Placing the craft in a larger historical, cultural, or social context to help visitors understand its significance beyond just its technical aspects.

All the storytelling forms or strategies above do not follow a predetermined program or plan and are largely contingent upon the needs or wants of audiences implying its adaptive function. Its adaptability is also expressed in the variety of forms or strategies by which artisans express their stories directly or indirectly.

3. Artisans as storytellers primarily bring their stories to life through a process which involves the making of crafts, which are then displayed and sold often through intermediaries e.g., stores, galleries or agents; documentaries or videos, etc. Wood carving as a form of storytelling of artisans is impinged by the scarcity of wood and its escalating prices due to logging bans in the region as a consequence of the degradation of the *Sierra Madre* mountain range where artisans source their wood from. Due to the scarcity of materials such as wood, many artisans have either used alternative mediums such as chocolate, fruits, vegetables or ice to carve which limited their audiences to those who are in cruise ships or hotels, where these artisan products are displayed. Due to the scarcity of materials, most artisans, especially those who have very limited capital find it difficult to produce or make crafts, hence affecting the storytelling activities of artisans in the locale. Despite the difficulties, however, many artisans However, when Covid 19 struck, technology, intersecting with the realm of art and giving rise to new forms of storytelling.

Artisans now have the opportunity to “stage” their works to clients using social media platforms, eliminating the need for intermediaries which enabled them to reach their audiences immediately using digital platforms.

4. For artisans, storytelling is fundamentally intertwined with their livelihood. It has a strong economic value. For artisans, it is what provides them with a roof over their heads, puts food on the table, and enables them to send their children to school. When they have the opportunity to discuss their crafts they often emphasize issues related to the scarcity of wood supply, primarily focusing on the impact it has on sustaining their livelihood. The artisan story is, essentially, a narrative intricately connected to their means of making a living (Aman, 2023; Elena, 2023; Lalaine, 2023; Pedro, 2023; Teresa, 2023).

5. In Paete, though a number of artisans have shifted to other professions from crafts making, many families and individuals still rely on carving, *taka* or paper mache-making for a livelihood, indicating a large pool of crafts makers in the local community and hence, an immense human capital for craft production. This aligns with the literature reporting a large number of employed individuals in the creative industries cohorts on a national scale between 2018-2022.

6. Storytelling through crafts making is likewise hampered by the lack of adequate support from the government to address long-term needs related to capacity building for artisans and enhancing engagement with their audiences despite the government’s good efforts. Moreover, crafts or craft trails appear to have been placed by the local government on the back burner as indicated in the recommended itinerary for the cultural route or trail of the town. To continue with their crafts, artisans often rely on their own networks, capital and individual strategies including apprenticeships with their relatives or family members to teach and pass on the skill of carving, for example.

Audience Engagement through Storytelling of Artisans in the Paete Crafts Trail or Route

Key themes

1. Based on the audience survey, the majority of audiences who have gone to the trail and experienced the storytelling of artisans belong to generation X or those aged between 41-56 years old, which may indicate a low interest from audiences belonging to the Millennial and Generation Z groups. This is significant because these demographic cohorts were the largest population of audiences globally who consume content through digital media and online platforms (Euajarusphan, 2021). The survey conducted with the audiences by the author indicates that the Millennial and Generation Y and Z group have not been fully tapped and engaged for artisan storytelling and could provide opportunities to expand audiences for the Paete crafts trail to support its sustainability.

2. The interaction between audiences and artisan in storytelling are explored in terms of 4 indicators as follows :

- a. Knowledge gain
- b. Satisfaction
- c. Attitude change
- d. Behavior modification (Roberts, 2014)

In terms of knowledge gain, the majority of respondents express a positive change in their perception of the value and importance or significance of the Paete heritage trail from the story by artisans and hence indicate a benefit in sustaining the trail as it potentially leads to increased support for its preservation and long-term sustainability.

In terms of satisfaction of audiences with the storytelling, the data suggests that there is range of satisfaction levels among audiences and indicates that while adaptive storytelling by artisans at the Paete heritage crafts trail has the potential to be effective in sustaining the trail or route, there is room for improvement in terms of the satisfaction levels of the

audience of artisan storytelling. A further analysis of the feedback from the audience might be needed to identify and analyze the areas that can be addressed.

In terms of audience attitude, the survey indicates that artisan storytelling has the potential to increase respect for the cultural significance of the crafts and foster a desire to preserve the crafts heritage trail which are positive indicators of the potential benefits of storytelling of artisans in the Paete crafts heritage trails. Additionally, the respondents have indicated that the artisan storytelling by artisans in the Paete trail has heightened their desire to preserve the crafts heritage trail indicating that it has generated a sense of ownership and responsibility among audiences towards preserving the trail which is crucial for its sustainability as it encourages individuals to actively engage in its protection and promotion.

Furthermore, the responses from the respondents who have expressed a change in attitude in terms of their desire to learn more about traditional crafts and heritage. It indicates that storytelling has sparked curiosity and interest in the broader aspects of crafts heritage and hence a potential to not only sustain the Paete trail but also contribute to the broader appreciation and understanding of crafts heritage in the site. Though the impact of storytelling may vary among the audiences of the trail, the majority of the respondents express positive attitude outcomes towards sustaining the trail.

Most of the respondents have expressed a positive change in behavior as expressed in their motivation to buy the crafts which can contribute to the economic viability of the trail and artisans' continued practice of their crafts. Based on the data, a significant number of respondents are willing to buy the crafts based on their storytelling experience with artisans, indicating that the artisans are able to communicate their stories to the audiences and hence positively influence the sustainability of the site.

Implications for Sustainability

Key themes

1. The engagement of audiences through storytelling can create economic and cultural conditions that can foster sustainability as it contributes to the benefit and well being of the stakeholders in terms of

a. Economic development

This is indicated by the audience's positive attitude and behavior response towards patronizing the trail as indicated by their intentions to pay extra for storytelling and being motivated to buy artisan crafts after experiencing storytelling by artisans. On a micro level, this can contribute to support and sustain the trail as it will provide economic capital for artisans to continue making crafts and hence have the opportunity to make a living and support their families.

b. Preservation and conservation of the trail or heritage site

According to the data, audience engagement through storytelling has a positive impact on the conservation of the Paete crafts route or trail. It indicates that when audiences understand and appreciate the aesthetic values of crafts, they are more likely to advocate the preservation of the trail which can have a positive impact on the artisans as it can create market demand and economic opportunities for them. The preservation of the crafts through the patronage of audiences of crafts also contributes to the validation and recognition of the artisans— their skills, craftsmanship and a sense of pride and their work contributing to their well-being and enhances the sense of identity and community pride and well of stakeholders involved.

c. Social cohesion and community engagement

Audience engagement through storytelling can bring people together, fostering a sense of cohesion and a strong sense of identity and community. By engaging audiences through storytelling, cultural values and experiences are interpreted and shared and hence a sense of belonging and connectivity is developed, which can in turn lead to collaboration and collective action in support of the communities and individual members of the community.

d. Generation and transmission of knowledge and meaning-making

Storytelling as a communicative and interpretive tool has the capacity to engage the audience by generating and transmitting knowledge. As shown in the data, when audiences immerse themselves in the narrative and understand the message

conveyed through storytelling, they experience a sense of satisfaction. This satisfaction goes beyond mere entertainment as it serves to foster conservation, preserve heritage authenticity and hence, support sustainable practices benefiting the community and the individual members of the community.

2. However, such conditions are automatically warranted as it is influenced by other factors such as environmental degradation, health crisis and advancement in technology.

The findings of this study has provided valuable insights into the role of adaptive storytelling as an interpretive and communicative tool to facilitate audience engagement and its implications for the sustainability in the Paete heritage trail. The analysis of participant feedback, surveys and observations have revealed a strong positive relationship between adaptive storytelling and audience engagement. The participants expressed high levels of satisfaction, reported significant knowledge gain and demonstrated positive attitude changes and behavioral modifications as indicators of their experiences in the trail or route.

The results underscores the potential of storytelling as a powerful meaning-making tool for establishing the conditions for the sustainability of the Paete crafts heritage trail. Through storytelling, the audiences of the trail enhance their understanding and appreciation of the Paete trail and its cultural significance. It fosters a sense of advocacy for the preservation and and conservation of the trail, leading to the protection of the authenticity of its heritage and cultural values which in turn supports cultural and economic sustainable practices that can benefit the artisans themselves, individual members of the community and the Paete community at large.

In light of these findings, this study suggests that adaptive storytelling by artisans plays a crucial role in the sustainable management of the Paete heritage trail/route. Its proper integration and management can catalyze audience engagement and foster conditions for the long-term viability of the Paete trail or route.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study shows a correlation between storytelling, audience engagement, and sustainability within the context of the Paete crafts heritage trail or route. The findings indicate that artisan storytelling is a powerful catalyst that can lead to potential attitude change, knowledge gain or modification of behavior (Roberts, 2014), thereby fostering conditions for sustainability. However, it is important to emphasize that effective storytelling does not guarantee automatic sustainability as sustainability involves a complex web of interrelationships that include environmental, social, economic and cultural factors that extend beyond the realm of storytelling as a communicative and interpretive tool. Moreover, while storytelling can contribute to the creation of favorable conditions for the sustainability of the trail, it is susceptible to the influence of other external factors such as fluctuations in the demands for crafts and health and environmental crises both at the micro and macro levels. Understanding the direct impact of storytelling through audience engagement will require a holistic approach that takes into account a wider context and multiple factors.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

At present, there is no predetermined storytelling program specifically designed for the Paete crafts trail. Throughout its long history, the trail has continued to thrive without undergoing an evaluation of the experience of the visitor. In the light of the recent shift to a digital paradigm which was expedited by the COVID-19 crisis, an ambience audit of the site may be conducted to assess it in terms of the experience of the visitor for purposes of expanding its audience reach and enhancing its adaptive storytelling practice to cater to the needs of the younger audiences on new digital platforms.

One of the key insights derived from this study emphasizes the pivotal role of the artisans as key actors in the interpretation of the Paete crafts heritage trail. Given their significant role in interpreting the community's heritage, it is essential that the local government prioritize their protection and provide support, particularly through capacity building initiatives to ensure that their long-term needs such as enhancing their craft skills and

staging their crafts can be met effectively within the context of interpretation in light of the recent shift to online technologies. By improving their craft staging and creating a unique visitor experience, artisans can improve to further contribute to the trail's conservation and viability.

Most artisans face difficulties in their production process, which subsequently affect the interpretation of their craft. One of the obstacles they face is the scarcity of materials, particularly wood, which greatly impact their ability to create and express their artistry. To address this issue, it is crucial for the local government to prioritize finding solutions by collaborating with non-governmental organizations or initiating private-public partnerships to explore avenues to ensure a sustainable supply of materials for artisans to enable them to continue their creative endeavors and preserve their cultural heritage.

There is also a huge dearth in research in academia which hinders the development of effective interpretive practices. To address this gap, it is essential to promote partnerships and collaborations with scholarship granting institutions to facilitate research initiatives that focus on research interpretation to inform praxis in the field.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1. Interviews with Key Informants

Interview with Artisans and Stakeholders

[Interview Questions for Artisans](#)

Access to the [interview recordings](#) may be granted upon request.

Annex 2. Survey with Audiences

[Survey with Audiences](#)

Access to the complete [survey results](#) may be granted upon request.