

On the coast of caíçara handicrafts Paraná, Brazil: the new normal post pandemic Covid-19

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Abstract

Handicrafts have historically always been practiced in Paraná Coast, Brazil, being a source of income for dozens of families, however this scenario has undergone profound changes with the pandemic of the New Coronavirus (COVID-19), but no studies were found that could reveal the changes caused among artisans as a result of the pandemic. Thus, descriptive exploratory research was carried out with 35 artisans residing on the Coast of Paraná. Women were the majority among the investigated group (65.7%) with an average age of 54 years old. The study revealed that in the perception of the interviewees it is possible to notice the recovery of the impacts caused by the pandemic on the family budget, with the increase in the income obtained from the sale of handicrafts, however in the opinion of the majority of the interviewees (68.57%) the recovery could have been accelerated if there were public policies for easy access to artisans. The study revealed that in Paraná Coast, after the pandemic of the New Coronavirus, there was a reduction in jobs and regional income, and it consequently affected family income and that, in the face of so many deaths, the class of widowed, black or brown women emerged in the investigated sample. The lives of these women are marked by precariousness and they feel more strongly the impacts of segregation due to the need to provide for all family needs by themselves.

Keywords: handicrafts; health crisis; finances; economic recovery.

1. Introduction

The emergence of a new virus that reached the population on a world scale, established a global crisis in 2020 which affected and still affects economic aspects in a way that, in contemporary times, it had not yet experienced (SILBER, 2020). With its initial appearance in China at the end of 2019, the New Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) a few months after its emergence, it was already registered in practically every country in the world, and in the face of an unknown scenario and uncertainties, nations needed to seek immediate solutions, given that there was no completely assertive strategy to face them (WERNECK; CARVALHO, 2020). As an emergency contingency, there was an appeal for social isolation, in order to reduce the contagion, until the levels of contamination showed a decrease in cases, however, this strategy impacted the economy, generating a decrease in the production of goods and services and consequently problems in income generation due to the sudden obstruction of the economy due to the restrictive measures imposed by the governments (SILBER, 2020).

Although there are several indications of the economic recovery and consequently of consumption, the post-pandemic future still presents itself in an uncertain scenario. Since the process of reopening businesses and easing restrictive measures, as well as the non-mandatory use of masks, is conditioned by the control of COVID-19 as well as the situation faced by the health system at the national and local levels (LINS; LEMME, 2020).

Although social isolation was a necessary measure, the business world suffered a great collapse, with the closing of companies, reduction of the migratory flow of people, especially in regions with strong tourist interest such as the Paraná Coast in Brazil. This region followed the flow of social isolation, applying restrictive measures impacting the performance of commercial activity in the region, thus generating uncertainties for entrepreneurs regarding the maintenance of their organizations, being among the sectors that suffered most from the period of social isolation the artisans who sell their products in public places and squares where there was a strong presence of tourists (ANACLETO; PRAZERES, 2020).

According to SEBRAE (2010), handicraft is characterized as the manufacture of products resulting from the skill, dexterity, quality and creativity of its performer, whether by traditional or rudimentary means, and traditional or caiçara handicrafts are described as products that express the culture of a given region, the one that is passed on through generations and constitutes traces of the routine life of family and/or traditional groups. Family income in these cases was one of the aspects in which the pandemic had the greatest negative effects, as inflation had a recurring high due to external adversities, which have had consequences on the family budget, resulting in a growing level of default (CNC, 2022). From an economic point of view, handicraft is seen as informal work in response to the crisis in the socio-business environment, which exists with the purpose of producing income and occupation for individuals. However, it cannot be reduced to this simple definition, as artisanal practices, specifically those linked to the traditional or caiçara culture, tend to attribute identity and traditions to the regions to which they belong.

Specifically with regard to the Paraná Coast, Anacleto and Prazeres (2020), report major impacts on the regional economy, and in some sectors such as handicrafts, the drop in the income during the pandemic period reached rates above 70%. Also, according to the authors, the pandemic has changed consumer behavior,

which fearful intensified online buying and selling, but with the resumption of the new normal, the profile that the consumer presents is still not definitively known, and in this sense, it is urgent to have new researches in order to understand the reflections of the phenomenon caused by the pandemic and the reflections on regional crafts.

Considering the process of economic recovery and aiming to subsidize the establishment of actions for the caiçara handicraft segment, the result of the brief overview of the production and trade of caiçara handicrafts on the Coast of Paraná is presented, evaluating the new normal post pandemic (COVID-19).

2. Methodology

Descriptive exploratory research was carried out in the 7 municipalities that make up the Coast of Paraná, with a qualitative-quantitative and cross-sectional approach, using a semi-structured questionnaire.

Data collection was carried out based on relations of convenience and accessibility, that is, from the active search for artisans and the application of the questionnaire in person. These searches involved scheduled visits, as well as attendance at fairs, stores, cooperatives, municipal markets and events related to the theme of caiçara handicrafts, 55 artisans were identified, however, only 35 voluntarily participated in the study.

The application of the research instrument began on June 4th and lasted until July 9th 2022 and consisted in an audio recording of the dialogues for later transcription and tabulation of the data through the consent of the interviewee in relation to the consent form, which was expressly informed before the beginning of the interview.

After completing the data collection stage, the transcription of the obtained audios began, such transcripts followed the *ipsis litteris* format, which consists of transcribing the language as it is spoken. This step was essential to contribute to the process of identifying information inherent to the ongoing investigation.

The data processing process was carried out through the interpretation of transcripts and elaboration of the Cross Impact Matrix, following the premises proposed by Anacleto and Prazeres (2020), seeking to understand and relate the expressive amount of information, through links among the categories and concepts in order to validate the bibliographic assumptions, making the findings sufficiently robust, in order to describe the profile of the artisan from the Coast of Paraná and understand the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of the family budget of this group.

3. Results

The Coast of Paraná during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the first year, experienced restrictions on movement in public places, especially tourist places, places where commercial relations took place, this situation had strong impacts on the way of life of artisans in the region (Table 1).

Table 1 - Diagnosis of the scenario related to caiçara handicrafts Paraná Coast in the perception of the interviewees.

Rating	Negative factors during the pandemic	RI*
1	Stoppage of activities prevented sales	25,51
2	Impossibility of production due to the restrictions	18,22
3	Artisans were sick physically and mentally	14,17
4	Lack of preparation to meet the increase in online sales	11,34
5	Lack of ability to absorb online demand	11,34
6	Restriction of consumer movement	7,29
7	Difficulty in acquiring inputs/raw materials for production	4,86
8	Difficulty in accessing financial support guaranteed by the government notices of the Aldir Blanc Law	3,24
9	Shortage of raw materials	2,83
10	Decrease in consumer purchasing power	1,21

*RI = Relevance Index

In terms of the relationship between commercialization and income generation, during the period of health crisis, it was evidenced that 68.57% of the sample population did not carry out commercial activities linked to their artisanal production, having had a reduction of income in the order of 94.28%. However, in this new normal, 88.57% of artisans say that the heating up of economic activities in the handicraft market segment is noticeable. This can be confirmed in this new normal, given that the income reported in this study, according to the interviewees, ranged from BRL 600.00 to BRL 1,349.00.

After the pandemic period, women were the majority among the people interviewed (65.7%), in relation to age, it was evidenced that the female respondents had an average age of 54 years old and the males 50 years old.

As for the ethnicity of the interviewees, it was found that 48.57% are white, 40% are brown, while blacks and indigenous people have the same proportion for the sample, with a representation of 5.71% each one.

The data found for the categorization of the marital status of the interviewees show that they are predominantly married (Figure 1) and had an average of 2 children per family arrangement.

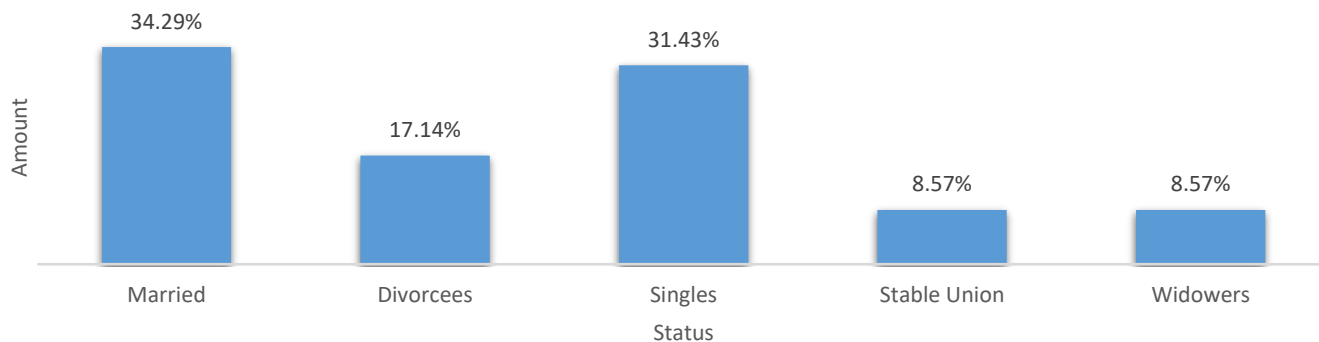


Figure 1. Sample distribution by marital status of Artisans from Paraná Coast (n=35)

Regarding schooling, most of the interviewees had schooling related to high school (Figure 2):

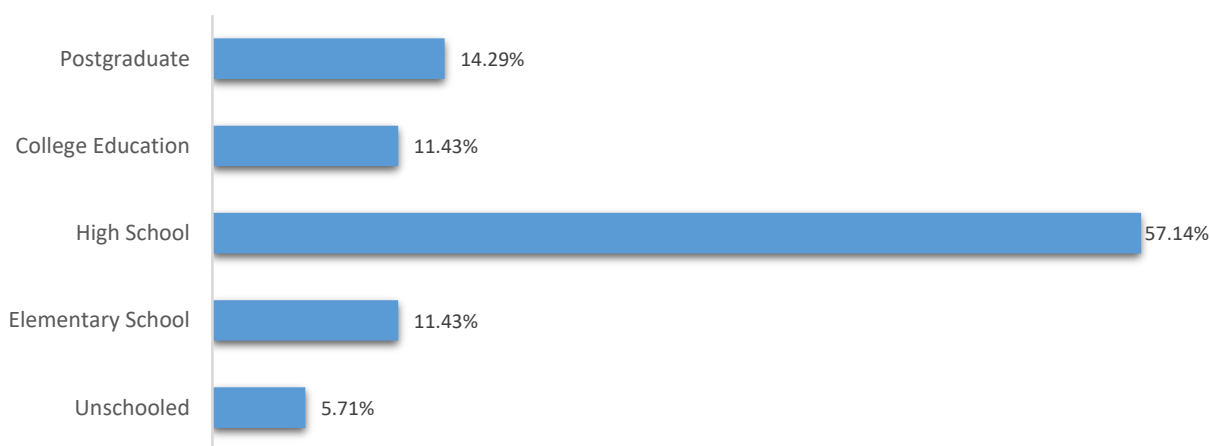


Figure 2. Sample distribution (%) related to the Education of Artisans from Paraná Coast

The average time dedicated to handicraft was 21 years, and a significant part of the interviewees (65.71%) had their only source of income in their professional activity (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of average income among artisans from Paraná Coast after the pandemic period.

Income from handicrafts	Sample distribution %
Up BRL 599.00	11,42
From BRL 600.00 to 1,349.00	40,00
From BRL 1,350.00 to BRL 2,249.00	11,42
From BRL 2,250.00 to BRL 3,999.00	20,00
From BRL 4,000.00 to BRL 7,799.00	11,42
From BRL 7,800.00 to BRL 18,799.00	2,85
Above BRL 18,000.00	2,85

The other part of the interviewees had retirement income and other diverse work activities, and for many of them they are the only responsible for structuring the family income, with the need to carry out parallel activities in order to complement the necessary resources for subsistence, being that this situation was similarly exposed by Lima (2020), where it is evident the need to supplement the income of artisans through other professional activities so that the family can have all the basic needs and others met satisfactorily.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had effects on society as a whole. With regard to the commercialization of handicrafts and income from commercial relations, the impact of the restrictive measures introduced to contain the spread of the virus. In line with Lima (2020), it is possible to say that the drop in income of 94.28% of the artisans interviewed is interconnected with the sequelae resulting from the pandemic process.

Another relevant data is related to the aspect of working time, which was verified, it corresponds to the presence of artisanal practice in the family environment as a driver of influence for the performance of artisanal functions of the interviewees. Of the total observed, it was found that 57.1% have the presence of other family generations involved in the execution of the handicraft activities. For another 17.2%, the presence of handicrafts in the family structure was only for entertainment purposes (hobby). On average, each artisan has 2 family members contributing to the artisanal activity.

In addition, there was a perception regarding the training of artisans through the continuing education courses in order to improve the skills performed, where 60% of the respondents reported that they sought guidance to improve their techniques and the other sample claimed to be self-taught in creating methods to the execution of the work.

Among the main types of materials used to make the caiçara handicrafts (Figure 3), the following were identified: natural fibers, vines, wood, shells, seeds, bovine leather, fish leather and scales, argil, bamboo, feathers, rock fragments and coconut shell. The acquisition of such materials, according to the majority of respondents (48.57%) is carried out exclusively on the basis of extractivism. However, 40% claim to acquire raw materials through wholesale suppliers, in parallel with extractive practices, and only 11.42% say to obtain their raw material exclusively through wholesale suppliers.

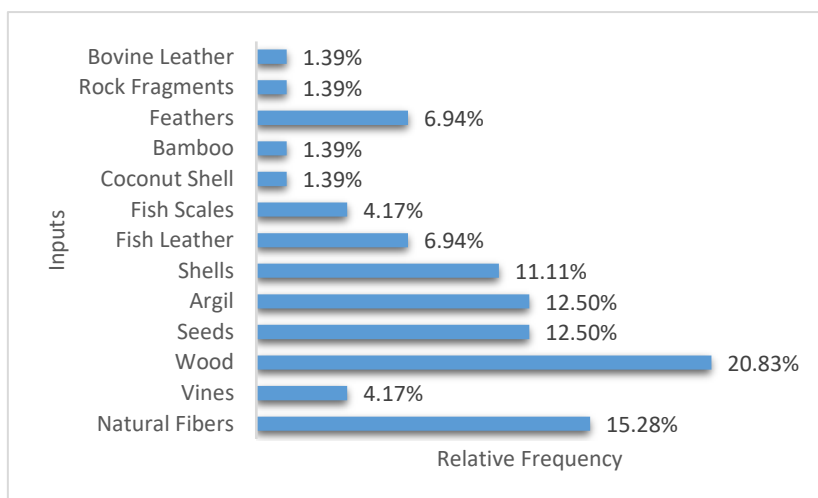


FIGURE 3 – Main materials used in Caiçara Handicraft Production Paraná Coast (%).

The respondents affirm to have knowledge about the process of measuring the operating costs involved in production, of which 91.42% indicate the ability to compose sales prices compatible with the market in which they operate, as well as the construction of the profit margin for their business.

In relation to the public incentive policies aimed at handicrafts, 68.57% of responses were obtained noting the inexistence and/or inefficiency of support from the public sphere for this segment, and the form of public incentive perceived was through public notices or concession of spaces for exhibitions and commercialization of the pieces.

4. Discussion

The pandemic period caused profound changes in the artisans' life system, and the main impacts received were related to the interruption of commercial activity, which in Brazil, was classified as non-essential, a situation that determined that physical spaces such as municipal markets and fairs were not authorized to operate, in addition to the restrictions being imposed on the movement of tourists, consumers, including the artisans themselves, who, as a result, began to face difficulties in accessing raw materials and sell their handicrafts.

Another important change was the increase in demand from online sales, which increased during the pandemic period. This issue is intertwined with the process of social isolation, as this condition caused individuals to have a different view of their homes linked to aesthetic and decoration criteria, and with that, they sought to acquire works by artisans in order to make the environment in which they live more welcoming. However, this increase in orders is seen as a factor that caused a production bottleneck, since the demand has become greater than the artisans' operationalization, as they are manual crafts, which are characterized by slow design patterns. Another factor that made it impossible to meet this demand were the prices related to the transport of the pieces, which increased the final cost for the consumer.

After the pandemic period, it was observed that the average age among the people interviewed was 50 years old, with a predominance of women. A previous study carried out by Anacleto et al. (2018) in the same region, showed inverse data to that found in this study, although it is not possible to be precise. Statistics from the IBGE (2022) reveal that the mortality caused by COVID-19 affected and changed the composition of Brazilian families. With the highest mortality of men in all regions of Brazil, women who already have multiple tasks in hundreds of families had to assume the role of home providers alone. Alves (2021) reports new structural demographic trends that relate the increase in Brazilian population mortality in the post-pandemic period. Marital status can also be an indication of what Alves (2021) reported regarding handicrafts, given that according to Anacleto et al. (2018) in the pre-pandemic period most artisans (75%) were married and the presence of widows was not measured, which differs in the post-pandemic period where 9% reported being widows and the number of single people almost tripled. The United Nations (UN, 2019) reports that many widowed women, especially the younger ones, suffer prejudice due to the situation experienced and numerous times for this reason they declare themselves single.

The New Coronavirus pandemic caused a strong reduction in jobs and regional income, according to Soares et al. (2021) this factor that consequently affected family income and increased indebtedness levels, in

the face of so many deaths, explained the resilience of women in the struggle for survival, who performed domestic activities, parental care and became active in the labor market. This new configuration is also attributed to the fact of being a widow, black or brown. According to Martins and Alagia (2020), the lives of these women are marked by precariousness and women without formal employment feel strongly the impacts of segregation and suffer greater pressures due to the need to provide their homes and all family needs by themselves. The consequences of the pandemic made this clear, according to Macedo (2020) for women, who have always faced prejudice throughout history, the double segregation for being a widow, black, brown or mixed race, contributes significantly to physical and mental disease and as a consequence, it can result in the emergence or worsening of contemporary diseases such as tiredness and stress.

The existence of family members in the artisanal activity was observed in this research, where artisans have an average of 57.1% working in the family format, composed of, in addition to the artisan, 2 family members concomitantly, which denotes through the presence of other individuals of the family performing such activities, the process of cultural legacy succession. Gonçalves, Grangeiro and Silva Júnior (2018), also reported the cultural tradition and the transmission of knowledge in handicrafts through orality, a condition that allows the maintenance of regional culture. Despite the long time dedicated to the activity, the concern among the interviewees in the aspect of training and professional development was still observed in the study, the data from this research converge with those of Gonçalves, Grangeiro and Silva Júnior (2018), as they found artisans who reported having learned the caiçara practices outside the family, seeking external knowledge.

The handicraft activity has always been linked to the family nucleus, where individuals grow up observing the manual practices of their ancestors in the process of artistic creation and cultural manifestation. This relationship becomes an integral part of the daily lives of individuals, who, because they know such creation techniques, make products for personal use and also for sale and family support (BASSI et al, 2017). The knowledge of handicrafts is useful in times of economic crisis and fragility of survival, when individuals are able to manufacture products, in order to raise financial resources to supplement their income, including food security. According to Bassi et al. (2017), one of the objectives of crafts is that “in times of economic crisis when extra income is needed to complete the budget, crafts can be a source of achieving the goals”.

The practices for obtaining raw materials evidenced in this study showed that compared to the period before the pandemic, as Anacleto et al. (2018) reported that 85% of all raw materials were based on exclusively extractive practices and in the present study 48.57% have extractivism as a source of obtaining raw materials.

The handicraft production is influenced by its socio-geographical context, which determine unique characteristics for each region, since they express cultural traits in relation to their people, raw material and location. Within this artisanal production, it is possible to perceive specific characteristics in relation to the artisan's performance format, which is based on the establishment of organizational structures, mostly informal and family-oriented, which are usually linked to low levels of management and income administration, but also at deficient levels of education (SANTOS, CROCCO, LEMOS, 2002; FIGUEIREDO, MARQUESAN, 2014; GRANGEIRO, BASTOS, 2016; GONÇALVES; GRANGEIRO; SILVA JUNIOR, 2018).

The activity is often a type of artistic expression marginalized due to the lack of recognition within the artistic field, which is seen as a secondary activity in relation to other cultural manifestations, even though they have similar techniques and materials in their respective creation processes. (LIMA, 2009; FIGUEIREDO, MARQUESAN, 2014).

The handicraft activity, even though it is the main source of income for some of the interviewees, it is insufficient when it comes to the composition of the family budget, since the handicraft, specifically caiçara or traditional, does not cover the entire global variety of crafts, and with that, it is necessary to insert a variety of raw materials and techniques in the making of the works, which goes according to the law of offer and demand, when it comes to the need of consumers of local handicrafts, the productive variety becomes a factor limiting to people who want to survive exclusively from caiçara handicrafts, as reported by the interviewees:

“Nowadays, I work with beauty and women empowerment artifacts. Then, I work with braids, ‘tererê’, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, ‘macramé’, dream catchers, I get henna tattoos in the summer season, which is also what makes me strong financially” (Interviewee, 16).

“So, I have to diversify my pieces” (Interviewee, 26) “

So, there is a lot to put in the store and to dedicate to a single piece of handicraft is complicated, isn't it?” (Interviewed, 35)

The public policies for the development and strengthening of handicrafts are unknown to the vast majority of respondents, 68.57% of artisans supported the positioning of the absence or inefficiency of policies, however, 31.42% of respondents reported having knowledge of public policies by through public notices to encourage culture, such as the Aldir Blanc Law (Law 14,017, June 29th 2020), in addition to the concession of spaces in fairs and municipal markets, however Lima (2020) describes that despite the existence of this type of support, there is also the difficulty of access by artisans to these resources, especially due to the difficulty of proving the exercise of the profession and the excess of bureaucratic requirements. The difficulties and the absence of the State in supporting this class of workers can be felt in the testimonies obtained:

“Before, we also had support from the federal government and now they think we are bums, that poor people have to die, right?” (Interviewee, 1).

“Public policies are very slow, they do what is strictly necessary and obligatory, because the national culture system predicts that these public policies must exist, but the culture budget in all areas is getting smaller and smaller” (Interviewee, 5).

"There is nothing. People who do it like this, go calmly and know, with love, with determination and with no support” (Interviewee, 24).

Lima (2020) arguments are in line with the statements in the study interviews, which emphasize the lack of knowledge about such political support practices, which corroborates the idea of ineffectiveness of public policies to encourage artisans.

5. Final Considerations

The artisans that make up the sample were predominantly women (65.7%) with an average age of 54 years old.

The study revealed that in the perception of the interviewees it is possible to notice the recovery of the impacts caused by the pandemic on the family budget, with the increase in income obtained from the sale of handicrafts, however in the opinion of the majority of the interviewees (68.57%) the recovery could have been accelerated if there were public policies for easy access to artisans.

The study revealed that on the Coast of Paraná, after the pandemic of the New Coronavirus, there was a reduction of jobs and regional income, and it consequently affected family income, and that in the face of so many deaths, the class of widowed, black or brown women emerged in the investigated sample. The lives of these women are marked by precariousness, and they feel more strongly the impacts of segregation due to the need to provide all family needs.

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