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The strategic role of private higher education in the development of traditional art crafts in Burkina Faso

Abstract. The article examines the role of private higher education institutions in the process of preserving and further developing traditional crafts and artisanal skills in Burkina Faso. The author emphasizes the importance of private education in strengthening national identity, supporting creative initiatives and facilitating the integration of traditional skills into the modern economy. The importance of three key factors in transforming the craft sector is revealed: the use of artificial intelligence, active presence on social networks and the involvement of students in the process of preserving and developing unique cultural heritage. The article highlights the need for active participation of universities in training qualified personnel and creating conditions for the successful adaptation of traditional forms of creativity to modern market requirements.

Keywords: private universities, traditional art crafts and craftsmanship, artificial intelligence, social networks, student, cultural heritage, international relations, economic transformations, educational innovations.

The strategic role of private higher education in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso boasts one of the most dynamic private higher education ecosystems in its subregion [3]. Private institutions contribute to expanding access to university-level education, fostering pedagogical innovations, supporting creative industries, and being more open to collaboration [2].

Over a period of 25 years, the Umanis Group has supported the socio-economic transformation of the country through its schools – the Institut Supérieur de Technologie (IST) and the Umanis Business School (UBS) – by providing education to nearly 8,000 students and having a presence across several African countries. A total of 37 diploma programs are accredited by the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES).

This experience enables us to fully invest in promoting art and craftsmanship, culture and traditional knowledge.

Traditional art crafts and craftsmanship of Burkina Faso: living identity and legacy for the future

Burkina Faso is internationally recognized as a land of craftsmen where blacksmithing, sculpture, woodworking, traditional textiles, basket weaving, leatherwork and ritual arts constitute a centuries-old heritage. These crafts are components that define identity, cultural transmission, innovation and employment on the labor market.

In the contemporary context of socioeconomic transformation, these trades serve as powerful tools for resilience, cultural sovereignty and international diplomacy.

Importance of higher education for rational modernization of traditional art crafts and craftsmanship

Higher educational institutions, including those within the Umanis Group, play a decisive role in shaping the future of art crafts. Today, three key factors are transforming this sector:

1. artificial intelligence (AI);
2. social media;
3. student engagement.

These levers present unprecedented opportunities not only for Africa but also for Russia.

1. Artificial intelligence (AI) at the service of traditional art crafts and craftsmanship

AI does not replace the master but enhances their creative potential, serving as a tool for documentation and driving innovation.

Specific applications in our schools:

digitization of traditional patterns using visual recognition and precise reproduction of Mossi, Bobo, Senoufo and other ethnic groups' ornaments;
creation of new designs with AI while preserving cultural authenticity;
virtual restoration of antique objects and 3D modeling before physical replication;
interactive learning platforms utilizing AI to teach rare craft techniques;
intelligent archiving in traditional crafts and creation of a digital library of Burkina Faso's art.

Thanks to AI, our educational institutions can become centers for the digital preservation of craft heritage.

Social networks as showcases for masters on an international level

Digital platforms today are the world's most powerful exhibition spaces:
establishment of digital studios in our schools for producing professional content showcasing masters' work;
training students and craftsmen in digital marketing for their products;
organizing viral cultural campaigns on social networks to promote traditional techniques, culture, and art;
creation of a university marketplace dedicated to certified artistic crafts products;
collaboration with cultural influencers to promote the art of Burkina Faso and Africa globally.

Social networks enable craftsmen to sell their products directly, expand their audience and represent their culture on a global scale.

Students as ambassadors of their culture

Students represent an exceptional creative and communicative force. How can they be engaged?

- establishment of innovation clubs focused on traditional craft production involving design students, engineers, communication specialists, and entrepreneurs;
- organization of cultural hackathons aimed at modernizing traditional forms of art;
- internships and immersion programs in local craft workshops and museums to facilitate knowledge transfer;
- involvement of students in real-world projects such as pattern modernization, development of marketable handmade items and creation of hybrid works combining tradition and innovation;
- participation in creative entrepreneurship programs supported by educational institutions within the Umanis Group.

Thus, students become active participants in transformation and change rather than mere observers.

Collaboration between Burkina Faso and Russia: a historical opportunity

Burkina Faso and Russia share a deep commitment to traditional values and view applied arts as a force contributing to unity and development. This forum lays the foundation for modern, ambitious and sustainable cultural cooperation.

Traditional crafts and industries are not relics of the past. Thanks to artificial intelligence, social media, students and higher education, they have become a powerful driver of innovation, cultural sovereignty, job creation and international influence.

It is together, by uniting our intellectual efforts, that we will build a future where heritage is cherished, talent valued and culture respected.

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