

# Cultural Identity that appear in Latin American Fashion: With a focus on the Mexican brands, Taller Flora and Fábrica Social

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**Abstract** *This study takes a look at the distinct and exclusive culture of Latin America, with a specific focus on Mexico, and attempts to understand its unique cultural identity by comparing, analyzing, and evaluating the characteristics of the Mexican fashion brands, Taller Flora and Fábrica Social, which are brands that have actively used the Latin American cultural identity in its designs. The research method was as follows: 1) performing literature research with specialty publications and thesis that dealt with the two brands 2) analyzing the contents of various articles from the Internet and interviews related to the brands. Thus, this research attempts to understand the characteristics of the fashion brands that use the cultural traits of Latin America in order to dissect its methods and find a way to apply it so that it can be used in different cultures, and in effect, lead to the advancement of the fashion industries, in general. Taller Flora and Fábrica Social are two brands that are able to stand out with a distinct identity by applying traditional native Latin American qualities in its products, as well as its products reflecting a respectful and balanced relationship between people and nature. The characteristics of the two brands are as follows: 1) showing the concept of "the coexistence of diversity" by expressing "the old and the new", "simplicity and flash", and "melding of the Western culture via colonialism and traditional cultures of the aboriginals and other diverse native cultures" 2) achieving "the recovery of the human dignity" by protecting the human rights of the native female artisans and building a network for equality 3) pursuing "free naturalism" by balancing the natural provision of nature and man in addition to promoting environmental protection and conservation of goods 4) becoming "the bridge between communication and exchange" by connecting the artisan, the designer and the consumers together, or the producer and the market, as well as the different cultures of markets from diverse countries.*

**Key words** *Latin America, Mexico, cultural identity, Taller Flora, Fábrica Social*

## **Introduction**

Globalization has led to increased interest in new cultures, and this has trickled down to the third world countries thanks to easier access to those places. Also, the influence of multiculturalism, which became

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prominent with the rise of postmodernism in the 1980s, has made it important for countries to recognize the diverse cultures in their nation as well as the rights of the minorities. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the attention on these diverse cultures have increased quickly in the global market, and its influence is only getting stronger, so it is necessary to evaluate what the diversity and distinctiveness of these cultures bring to the table.

Latin America, which is considered to be part of the Third World, is a general term used for the regions in North and South America that were colonized by European countries of Latin origin. It is a region that features a unique culture where various forms of mixed-races and cultures coexist. Ancient traditional cultures and certain facets of the European culture from the colonial periods have mixed together to create a new blend of culture that has become Latin American culture. Lately, Latin American culture and arts, with the music and fine arts at the center, have garnered increased attention. Not to be outdone by other industries, its fashion industry has become an inspiration to global fashion design by their ability to not only blend the diverse Latin American cultures together, but also incorporate the different types of natural environments that can be found in their broad region. They have been able to distinguish themselves in twofold: 1) by emphasizing their ethnic tradition through designs that express their cultural identity 2) in their brand management policies.

Although all the Latin American countries have a similar cultural identity, there are varying degrees of differences between them. Each country has different ratio of race mixtures, depending on the dominant tribe or race of the region that habituated there originally; and so as each region was being established as a nation, the mixing of cultures and races were not identical. Mexico is, of all the Latin American countries, the nation that is populated the most with natives. It is a country where the indigenous culture of the region is protected and is able to coexist with the modern times, as well as a place with the best preservation of the mestizo culture<sup>1)</sup>, a culture that best exemplifies Latin American racial mixture and coexistence of culture identity. Also, Mexico has developed strong ethnic and national identity based on their strong and deep history of culture in fields such as astronomy, architecture, arts, and hieroglyphics. So this research will aim to study the general cultural identity of Latin America, and the method that the fashion brands of those countries utilize it in their products. Compared to other Latin American countries, Mexico has had the most chaotic history, however they withstood it, and somehow established a unique cultural identity. Also, their fashion industry is the standard bearer in the Latin American market, so the study has chosen to evaluate Mexico for its analysis as the focal point of the Latin American culture in this paper.

Latin American culture has become a big part of the global trend, and so the purpose of this study is to analyze the characteristics of the Latin American cultural identity, which is very distinctive and exclusive to that culture. It will evaluate the characteristics of the Mexican fashion brands, *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social*, two brands that have differentiated themselves from others by actively using the Latin American cultural identity in its designs as well as forming regional manufacturing networks. Mexico is a special country because it actually combined the factors that could have paralyzed the development of the country to develop its own unique culture. In other words, it was able to mix the

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remnants of colonialism and the coexisting cultures of the diverse native tribes. And the Mexican fashion brands, *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social*, have used the unique characteristics of this mixed culture in their products in order to stand out with a distinct identity in the fashion industry. They have also contributed to community development in the region. By researching the Mexican culture and the two brands, the goal of the study is to find ways for a country's fashion industry to better utilize its cultural identity in its fashion products, so that the industry can adapt and further advance in the global market as globalization accelerates with each passing year. And in more specific terms, the paper aims to propose ways for fashion brands to acquire brand identity through the findings of the research.

Currently, the most common method of research for Latin American fashion involves analyzing the clothing in artworks of Latin American artists such as Frida Kahlo or looking at the fashion designs inspired by traditional Latin American clothes that can be found in fashion houses in the western world. Researches on actual Latin American fashion brands that use national or cultural identity in its designs has been lacking. *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* are two brands that have advanced into the global market by emphasizing the Mexican cultural identity in its designs. They have done this by successfully incorporating two factors that play a huge part in it, multiculturalism and environmental friendliness.

The research method was as follows: 1) performing literature research with specialty publications and thesis that dealt with the Latin American culture 2) analyzing the contents of various articles from the Internet and interviews related to the two brands.

The visual materials, such as pictures, needed for the case analysis was collected via each companies websites, magazines, related books, newspapers, and Internet articles. Unlike other brands that have seasonal showcases, *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* only take part in one-time collaboration projects. In order to get a complete analysis of both brands, the study collected all the possible materials starting from the first year of the respective brands (*Taller Flora* - 1998 and *Fábrica Social* - 2006) to 2012.

### ***Thoughts on Latin American Cultural Identity***

Cultural Identity can be defined as a culture having a distinct characteristic that can be recognized and differentiated from other cultures. This identity can range from individuals to the whole nation, and it is a quality that forms and changes through its relationships with other cultures.

During the organic process that we call history, culture is formed by a society living and thinking in a certain way as it goes through different types of experiences, and that way of life is developed over a long period of time. During this time, the created culture provides a form of expression for its people<sup>2)</sup>. Also, culture can be defined as a word that sums up a way of life that a person acquires through experience as a member of a specific society, from standards, habits, and behaviors to symbols and guidelines<sup>3)</sup>.

It is a word that describes a system of rules that control or motivate general behavior rather than a specific language or action. So culture is members of a certain society sharing actions, customs and tendencies that can be differentiated from other societies<sup>4)</sup>.

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Identity is a concept of social psychology where a person or a group can identify oneself with the society and feel a sense of belonging through shared history and cultural background<sup>5)</sup>. Also, it is also being aware that, as an entity, the individual or the group has a distinctive characteristic that separates them from others, and is an image that gets formed and modified through its relationships with other groups over time<sup>6)</sup>. It is a characteristic that stays relatively consistent over long periods of time, and it is a quality that helps oneself to realize one's nature of existence, or is a quality that exists independently. Stuart Hall stated that "identity can be understood as shared history between individuals who have ethnic and cultural bonds, and it is steady and strong", and "identity is fluid and transitional, and it is even contradictory, so it is characterized by similarities as well as diverse points of differences"<sup>7)</sup>. In order for a certain cultural factor to be discussed as cultural identity, it needs to be shared by the majority of a group, while it is something that can be differentiated from other groups.

This research has limited the scope of the cultural identity to countries, and the individual identity and natural differentiation of a country makes up the distinctive cultural characteristics of that country. In other words, the distinctive culture of each country is formed through the accumulated experiences of its people over a long period of time combined with the acquiring and sharing of a certain lifestyle that allow the people to develop a sense of belonging to the group, while giving them a guideline to differentiate themselves from other groups. Also, even though cultural identity is discerned through interactions with other cultural groups, its values are not set in stone, meaning it can change through the passage of time and contact with other cultures. Now that cultural identity and its characteristics have been defined, this definition will be used to examine the cultural identity of Mexico, which will be a good representation of the Latin American cultural identity. The way its ethnic groups and its nations were established will be reviewed as well as a survey of the lifestyle of the people in various regions and natural environments.

#### **Cultural Identity that was formed during the establishment of a Latin American country and its ethnic groups**

Latin America refers to the region that spans from Mexico in North America to all the countries in South America, as well as the islands in the West Indies, however it is not a term that is limited to geological location. It is a term that encompasses the shared historical and cultural backgrounds of those countries. All the Latin American countries basically share the same history of being colonized and then going through the process of establishing their country after gaining independence, as well as the racially mixed population, a result of their time as European colonies. Latin American culture is a mix of indigenous native culture, the Iberian culture of its European colonizers, and the African cultures of the imported slaves, and depending on the area, the ratio of the mixture is different.

That is, Latin America has a very unique cultural identity that stems from its complex ethnic makeup as well as each country's history in establishing itself as a nation, and from these factors, its identity can be characterized by "coexistence of multiculturalism" and "the blending of mixed-race native

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culture”.

#### *Coexistence of Multiculturalism*

The concept of multiculturalism is a topic that has been discussed for a long time in Latin America, since it is a region that houses diverse races and cultures, and it is a concept that has had a huge influence on the issue of coexistence between races as well as restoring of culture and rights of different races. The majority of Latin American countries had to view racial and cultural mixtures as a positive in order for the countries to establish their identity after getting their respective independence, and positive discourse regarding these mixtures allowed them to use this unique condition to form nationalism and ethnic belonging in their countries. Also, the concept of multiculturalism allowed the countries to promote the establishment of the countries while forming the concepts such as transculturation, hybridity, and interculturality<sup>8)</sup>.

Latin American countries are made up of diverse races and it is a place where the past coexists with the present. First, it is a region that is populated by white European descendants of Spain and Portugal, indigenous Indio natives, African descendants of slaves, and diverse mixtures of white and native groups such as the Mestizo, Mulatto, and Sambo. So recognition of each other’s existence and the respect for the need to coexist between the diverse races of people can be observed. Second, it is a culture that has maintained its traditional Indio culture alongside the modern western reforms that has taken place over time. The splendid ancient Indio civilizations of the region such as the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incans, and the diverse indigenous tribes with their deeply rooted tradition had to deal with the European invasion and their colonization. This led to westernized cultural changes and a process of cultural re-creation. Even as the modernization continues to this day, Latin America is finding ways for traditional culture to coexist with the present. And of all the Latin American countries, Mexico contains all the factors mentioned above, from diverse mixtures of White-Indio races to the existence of the Mestizo culture, as well as being home to the Aztec and Mayan civilizations, which passed down a splendid culture of science, architecture and art.

The concept of multiculturalism in today’s Latin America advocates a cultural identity that promotes “equality among different people” and “true coexistence of diversity”, which leads to recognition of the differences rather than absorption or extermination of the weaker culture.

#### *The Blending of Mixed-Race Native Culture*

Latin American culture, which has become one of the important global trends, has seen itself expand thanks to its distinctive or exclusive traits, and the most unique factor that has played a significant role in giving the culture this quality is its native population. Not only there, but it is one of the most important factors that has influenced all facets of today’s Latin American nations from politics and economics to culture<sup>9)</sup>.

The natives were targets of harsh exploitation while the Latin American countries were establishing

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themselves as independent nations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and as the nations were advocating the western economic development model in establishing their various policies in politics, economics, and society in general, the natives were seen as a form of obstacle to this development. As a result, they were not recognized as members of the country and were alienated from society. These types of discrimination led to extreme poverty for them, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through sporadic armed struggles, there was a turning point in awareness in regards to the natives. The Latin American society started to recognize their native culture and its potential, and it has led to them becoming an important part of the society. Especially in Mexico, which has a huge native population, they have been largely successful in accepting the majority of the native population as members of the society, and are considered as a model example for this process<sup>10</sup>). They did this by encouraging people to accept and adopt diverse cultural inheritances of the natives, and these traditions have become more noticeable in the emotional parts of the society, such as the arts.

By having a dual structure that allows the minority to establish itself alongside the majority, natives who were shunned and mixed races who were seen as the lower class could have their way of life and culture be legitimized, and voices regarding their rights in economics and politics could be raised. And this process has helped develop the concept of culture that is unique to the Latin American culture.

#### **Cultural Identity that was formed through the natural environment in Latin America**

Natural environment is an important factor that influences the behaviors and development of a specific region. Geological location and climate played a big part in the native people's decision to settle in a certain place. It is near the Equator, which means that the region's climate fell into the category of tropical and sub-tropical, and most of the settlements are located in the alpine regions, which provides the inhabitants with relatively pleasant climate. The geological features of region are very diverse; it features mountain ranges, rivers, plains, oceans, and deserts, and the vast land provides its people with plenty of natural resources; and due to this characteristic, most Latin American countries focus on developing primary commodities. Only Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil have developed manufacturing industries, while others are still dependent on farming, raising livestock, and mining. There is a sense of "positive and passionate optimism" as well as "unexploited naturalism" that is a part of the complex Latin American cultural identity, and the source of these senses come from the abundant natural resources and the diverse natural environment that the region provides its people.

##### *Unexploited Naturalism*

Latin American countries, such as Mexico, lay claim to one of the vastest regions of land in the world, and abundant natural resources to go with it. However, compared to its size, it is relatively undeveloped, so it has to deal with the double-sided issue of development and preservation. Within the vast lands that have not been developed into cities, there exist many native tribes that have stayed with traditional way of life and have coexisted with their natural surroundings by only using the resources for

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their necessities.

*Positive and Passionate Optimism*

Unlike other Latin American countries, Mexico, which connects the temperate region and the tropical region, actually has a distinct summer and a winter, and the accompanying temperature difference. However, besides the limited regions of the mountain ranges, most of its land has mild climate throughout the seasons, so the Mexican people are able to live in relatively pleasant weather. Thanks to good climate as well as diverse and abundant natural resources, the people are relatively easygoing and have an optimistic personality. Because of their vibrant natural environment, they are used to seeing diverse colors in their surroundings, and they are known to hold festivals frequently, and in general, are very passionate and cheerful with a bright sensibility.

Even through the chaos and the order that their land went through with colonialism, these traits, which they acquired through their natural environment, were never lost on its people and it became a trait that helped its people to fuse its culture and develop it continuously. Mexico has had to deal with a dark history of invasions and struggles, then dealing with issues of huge gaps between the rich and the poor, separation of the social class, corruption, economic crisis, and issues with drugs and crime during the rapid westernization of its society. But even through all of these events, its people have faced it with optimism and perseverance, and have tried to resolve the issues through active democracy. They have also attempted to transcend their problems through their colorful art and culture of sensibility and restore positive order in their society.

***Cultural Identity that appears in Mexican Fashion Brands***

**Summary of Taller Flora**

In 1998, Carla Fernandez started her fashion label, *Taller Flora*. It started as a project brand that continued the traditional textile making of the indigenous natives by finding native artisans who made their own fabric and clothes, and the brand also had a mobile laboratory where fashion design workshops where fabric and clothing were made<sup>11</sup>.

*Taller Flora* is a brand that grew by basing their products off of the native Mexican artisans, and it has worked hard to create a responsible business model by building a fair trade network and environmentally friendly policies, which are considered to be groundbreaking. This model has played an important part in incorporating the traditional fabric manufacturing process into modern fashion design as well as strengthening the regional education. So, *Taller Flora* has become the bridge between the traditional textile making process of the ancient times and modern fashion design, and therefore can be considered to be a sound, future-oriented fashion brand.

Carla Fernandez was born in a suburb located in northern Mexico near Texas, and thanks to her father who was the director of National Institute of Anthropology and History; she got to travel all

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throughout Mexico and became exposed to diverse ancient clothing of the various regions. Using the valuable experiences such as these, she has continued to explore ways to blend the diverse ancient clothing of Mexico with modern western designs. Through the re-designing process, the people of the region are provided with the chance to re-evaluate their identity as well as their economic hardships and the women's role in their society. Also, by manufacturing and selling the clothes through a fair distribution process, the brand was able to setup and expand to a system where the people started to make profit instead of the bare minimum for self-sufficiency. It is a system where designers are compensated via incentives to make better products, which improve its quality, and then is distributed through a fair trade network. This leads to a healthy system where profit is made through sales of high quality products instead of companies profiting off of low wages of its workers. The *Taller Flora* brand has a workshop that believes in transforming the everyday materials into something new by combining innovation and tradition in its designs.

#### **Summary of Fábrica Social**

*Fábrica Social* is a large-scale non-profit/NGO enterprise that fashion designers, Emilienne Limón and Dulce Martínez, established in 2006<sup>12</sup>. Its aim is to provide work for women artisans in native tribes all over Mexico as well as to promote a better standard of living for these women by introducing the world to the diverse native design techniques and its accompanying high quality crafts.

The *Fábrica Social* brand has 7 values that it adheres to: equal opportunity, equity, dignity, creative freedom, self-determination, development of ability, and justice<sup>13</sup>. It is striving to achieve creative, economic and societal freedom and elevation of status for women, and is promoting this cause by using the traditional designs and distribution processes of the 6 native Mexican tribes. The profits that are made through this process are then returned to the native women. So *Fábrica Social* is a brand that is providing opportunities for native women artisans to develop and strengthen their manufacturing process, which, in turn, will promote a comprehensive growth for all indigenous women.

#### **Evaluating the characteristics of Taller Flora and Fábrica Social in the context of the Latin American cultural identity**

In order to evaluate the characteristics of *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* based on the Latin American cultural identity, the following factors have to be considered: “the coexistence of diversity”, “the recovery of the human dignity”, “free naturalism”, and “bridge between communication and exchange”, and seeing how these factors fit in the context of the tradition of the indigenous people and their artisan spirit.

##### *Coexistence of Diversity*

*Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* have applied the diverse traditional cultures of the Mexican natives in order to express the compromise between “the old and the new”, “the simple and the complex”



and “tradition and progress” that resides in today’s world. Expressing these types of compromises between factors that seem to conflict with each other has enabled them to show that coexistence of diversity is possible.

This quality is also present in the Latin American cultural identity that has emphasized “coexistence of multiculturalism” and “the blending of mixed-race native culture” throughout its history.

*Taller Flora* showed the possibility of “the coexistence of diversity” by utilizing the diverse skills and techniques that have been passed down through the ancient native tribes, such as its traditional patterns and handmade materials, and presenting them in very modern and creative designs. So, in other words, the shapes and colors of its designs find its root in traditional and regional culture, yet the fin-

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**Fig. 1.** Pattern combinations Illust of Taller Flora (Taller Flora e-book(libro\_carla\_fernandez[1]) <http://carlafernandez.com>)

ished design ends up being modern and future-oriented. Just like its philosophy, “tradition is not static and fashion is not ephemeral”<sup>14)</sup>, the brand has tried to keep its current business model by working hard to maintain its relationship with each of the groups in different region. In this model, the role of the artisans cannot be understated, and as for the brand, the ability to have this type of relationship is an important factor in differentiating the brand from other global brands as globalization is accelerating with each passing year.

The patterns and manufacturing techniques used by *Taller Flora* originated from observing the geometric patterns in the traditional clothing of the ancient times before the Spanish invasion. The native indigenous tribes’ clothing is composed almost entirely of rectangular and triangular shapes, which also appear frequently in traditional Mexican patterns. These geometric patterns are connected via darts, tucks, pleats and gathers, and therefore are organized in elaborate wrinkles or are folded in a way to give the impression that the pattern has countless amounts of rectangular and triangular shapes. <Pic. 1> This is an ancient assembly system, and is a type of “cloth origami”<sup>15)</sup> Also, as the brand utilizes many aspects of the Mexican traditional clothing such as huipil, rebozos, guayaberas, and carrose, it considers the origin of its form as the most important part of its design. Besides the origin, the brand has reinterpreted the different textile making and manual weaving processes of the native tribes in modern ways, and also have taken modern articles of clothing like shirts, blouses, pants, and skirts, and transformed them with geometric designs and functions that was representative of the native wear. And this has become a unique characteristic of *Taller Flora*. Just like <Pic. 2>, an article of clothing can be worn inside out or



**Fig. 2.** Depending on the location and how to wear skirts, dresses, outerwear such as coats and with various modifications and functions of Taller Flora Versatile Dress, 2010. (Taller Flora e-book(libro\_carla\_fernandez[1]) <http://carlafernandez.com>)

backwards depending on the body part. The flexibility of the clothes is possible due to the use of the triangular and rectangular patterns and its unique way of connecting these patterns. The many possibilities that the clothes offers in its looks show off the variability of the *Taller Flora* brand, and sensibility of its hybrid design.

*Fábrica Social* expresses the characteristics of “the coexistence of diversity” through “collaboration with native tribes by mixing and matching their work” and “collaboration with experts of various fields”.

Their manufacturing process is composed of using the traditional handmade materials of various indigenous tribes in Mexico, and using those materials, or sometimes developing new materials by mixing and matching the materials from the tribe, and creating their products, such as clothing, shoes, and accessories. Each tribe has different specialties and techniques, so the brand organizes for the natives to work together in order to create products, and then the finished product gets exhibited and sold as a joint venture. The brand also organizes collaborations with young female designers, as well as with on-line and offline stores, in order to promote and market its products, and in effect, the Mexican traditional culture to the world. Their products show the times and places of the past coexisting with the present. <Pic. 3> <Pic. 4>



**Fig. 3.**  
Fábrica Social’s Collaboration with ‘Chamuchic’ by the textile designer  
Claudia Muñoz, 2011.  
(<http://fabricasocial.wordpress.com/2011/07/02/meet-chamuchic-fashion-from-los-altos-de-chiapas>)



**Fig. 4.**  
Fábrica Social's Collaboration with Japanese artist Miki Amano, 2007.  
(<http://poketo.com/blog/2009/11/05/miki-amano-and-fabrica-social>)

*The Recovery of the Human Dignity*

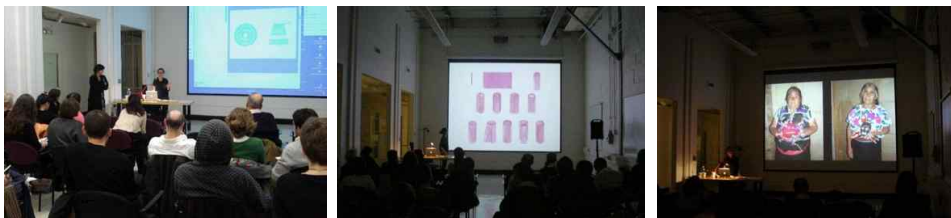
*Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* are putting their efforts in preserving and promoting the skills and techniques of the indigenous women artisans of the native Mexican tribes. Their diverse utilization of the women as a workforce is an important value as well as a reason for maintaining the brands. This desire of the brands is rooted in the Latin American cultural identity of “the blending of mixed-race native culture” and “the positive and passionate optimism”, characteristics instilled into its culture through its history and environment, respectively. These characteristics emphasize the importance of the artisan spirit and the sanctity of man.

The part of *Taller Flora* that expresses the characteristic of “the recovery of the human dignity” is their brand concept of “traveling laboratory”, where they hold workshops to indigenous natives who live in the outskirts of the country in order to provide education as well as job opportunities<sup>16)</sup>. Not only this, but they have also built a fair trade network that give them work, pay, and benefits that correspond with their value and ability. <Pic. 5> As the status of the indigenous women are low compared to the men due to the nature of the tribal society, the brand's intention is to treat the indigenous women artisans with the respect that matches up to their abilities, and build up a sense of higher worth, so that they will be able to elevate their status and become more independent. So, in this way, ‘Flora Workshop’ is a parallel process that uses reciprocal learning experience<sup>17)</sup> to help women artisans to come up with new design prototypes by grafting the traditional techniques that are familiar to them into new types of clothing, while also becoming a way for the artisans and the designer to improve their future or on-going designs by finding creative solutions through sharing of ideas. They have also held seminars in colleges to share the techniques and working methods of the women artisans, which has



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**Fig. 5.**  
Taller Flora's Workshop  
(Taller Flora e-book(libro\_carla\_fernandez[1]) <http://carlafernandez.com>)



**Fig. 6.**  
M.I.T conference of Taller Flora, 2008.  
([http://tallerflorados.blogspot.com/2008\\_09\\_01\\_archive.html](http://tallerflorados.blogspot.com/2008_09_01_archive.html))

brought the consumers closer to the brand, while making their process more transparent. <Pic. 6> <Pic. 7> The brand's website stated that some of its goals were to promote improvement of women's economic and societal status, and for indigenous women artisans to understand the worth of their ability and techniques enough to demand fair compensation for their products under the strict guidelines of the fair trade<sup>18)</sup>, and their regard for the dignity of people can be seen through this goal. Especially in the case of *Fábrica Social*, their philosophy of fair trade supports women artisan groups in determining the wages that will satisfy their needs. The brand is attempting to preserve and strengthen the techniques of the artisan, so that their identity among the consumers will become solidified. Not only this, but the brand is also in process of setting up domestic and international fair trade networks to guarantee profit for the artisans as well. Also, through their workshop, they are educating the consumers regarding the fabric manufacturing process, as well as the need for protecting the rights and dignity of the indigenous Mexican

artisans. This has led to a more horizontal relationship between the native artisan, the designer, and the consumer, which can also be said regarding the *Taller Flora* brand.



**Fig. 7.**  
NYC Youth learns about Fábrica Social, 2011.  
(<http://fabricasocial.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/nyc-youth-learns-about-fabrica-s>)

The characteristic of “the recovery of the human dignity” rises out of the cultural identity that emphasizes communal living, and optimism and affability that comes from abundant natural resources and the pleasant climate that Mexico offers. These factors made it possible for a manufacturing system that needed group work among the diverse groups of indigenous tribes, and it also contributed to higher efficiency as the people’s characteristics and their shared poor conditions promoted a desire to learn more together. Through the work of these brands, the native women artisans have attained a high level of satisfaction and inspiration and have led to a process of recovery, and it has enabled the brands to distinguish themselves in the global market. These brands can be considered as a life project that is providing native women artisans with a chance to become independent through not only valuing their work, but also promoting and marketing them so that they can profit from them.

#### *Free Naturalism*

*Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* have put their efforts to manufacture their products by utilizing environmentally friendly materials and processes that are possible through the abundant natural resources and the diverse geological conditions of Mexico. This is not intended just as philanthropy work, but rather to realize their goals of living out in a way where people are a continuation of nature. Also, being mindful of the impact that they will have on nature throughout the whole lifecycle of their product, from manufacturing to discarding. This stems from the Latin American cultural identity of “coexistence of multiculturalism” and “unexploited naturalism”, characteristics instilled into its culture through its history and environment, respectively. It is a characteristic that finds it important to put in the efforts to protect the environment and conserve goods, as well as to find the right balance between people and the nature.

*Taller Flora’s* concept of “free naturalism” not only includes developing their products with the na-



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tive artisans in the manufacturing process as well as incorporating environmentally friendly materials, manufacturing and dyeing, and postproduction work, but also the aforementioned geometric patterns and versatile clothing designs are part of the overlying concept. The process of making a new product can span several months as the work of the artisans were researched and developed. Also, because *Taller Flora* takes the human biorhythm and efficiency into account, it does not produce its manufacture its products according to the seasonal (Spring/Summer, Fall/Winter) releases. Instead, it plans collections that are one-off projects as they see fit. This is due to their desire for a system that allows the artisans to work freely without materialistic restrictions. The economic sewing technique that can be seen in the traditional native straight line patterns, and the multi-functional design were inspired by the natives who had to deal with various miscellaneous work while wearing their daily wear <Pic. 2>. <Pic.8> is an example of a multi-functional clothing design as it shows a coat that could also serve as a blanket. Also, *Taller Flora* has re-interpreted the native dressmaking method of either using straight-line patterns or sewing without using scissors in modern way and has been able to further develop their geometric pattern cutting process. This has resulted in unique designs and silhouettes as well as playing an important role in reduction of wasted materials through the use of geometric and line patterns. Thanks to this type of manufacturing process in addition to efficient utilization of the fabric has led to a method of design that has been able to conserve natural resources and consumption at the same time.

Cultural Identity  
that appear  
in Latin  
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**Fig. 8.**

Taller Flora's Chamula Coat, 2008.

(<http://tallerflorados.blogspot.kr/search?updated-min=2008-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2009-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&max-results=10>)

*Fábrica Social's* concept of "free naturalism" also includes developing their products with environmentally friendly processes and materials as well as having working conditions designed to optimize

productivity. As it can be seen in the design process shown in <Pic. 9>, vibrant colors and animals and plants that are common in the natural environment in Mexico are used as motif, and these are produced in environmentally friendly manner. They have also given the native women artisans with flexible contracts that provided them with an efficient and flexible work environment, including the ability to choose their working hours. <Pic. 10>



**Fig. 9.**  
Motifs derived from nature Fábrica Social work process to commercialization  
(<http://www.fabricasocial.org>)



**Fig. 10.**  
Native American artisans to be able to work freely in consideration of women in the work place and the environment Fábrica Social (<http://www.fabricasocial.org>)

*Bridge between Communication and Exchange*

*Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* are brands that have developed designs utilizing their country's cultural identity, which has fit well with the demands for diversity in the globalized market. But the brands are also non-profit organizations that are focused on human rights, education, preserving and enhancing the worth and an ability of its natives, thus having a revolutionary business model that has dual



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functions. These are socially conscious fashion brands that have bi-directional communication within its network due to its influences from all the factors of its country's cultural identity ("coexistence of multiculturalism", "the blending of mixed-race native culture", "unexploited naturalism" and "the positive and passionate optimism").

First, *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* serve a role as a horizontal link between the native artisans, the designers, and the consumer groups. The brands re-establish the status of the indigenous women by providing a better standard of living by actively supporting their rights as well as elevating their value. They are put in equal footing with the designer and the consumers as they are treated as craft artisans or artists who actually take part in educating and providing artistic inspiration and skills to the other members, instead of being treated as a member of an uncivilized tribe. Secondly, the brands have become the economic link between the producer and the market. They have played the role of commercializing the products of the native artisans by connecting the artisans' manufacturing process with the domestic and international marketing process. That is, they have provided blueprints that the native artisans need in order to sell their products directly, as well as having websites and blogs that not only share detailed information about the products, but also market and sell them. *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* do not limit themselves to designs, but are operating a project that is overseeing the whole process of discovering and educating natives with potential, designing, manufacturing, marketing, and selling. Lastly, it is a bridge between domestic and international cultures through diverse promotions and communications. They have made a revolutionary contribution by promoting the Mexican culture through the works of the indigenous native artisans, which has introduced the world to the new wave of Mexican designs and their cultural identity.

### **Conclusion**

It can be safely predicted that without deep cultural traditions, a country, even a political or economic powerhouse, will not get recognized as a cultural nation in the world, and furthermore, will not be able to establish its cultural identity and unique tradition.

The long history Mexico and Latin America, in general, are filled with ancient civilizations and other colorful events, and it has always been surrounded by beautiful natural environment and abundant natural resources. And these factors have contributed to its cultural identity, which is composed of the following characteristics: "the coexistence of multiculturalism", "blending of mixed-race native culture", "the unexploited naturalism" and "positive and passionate optimism".

The brand characteristics of *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* that have been drawn out of the Latin American cultural identity are as follows: "the coexistence of diversity", "the recovery of human dignity", "free naturalism" and "bridge between communication and exchange". Thus, the brands have maintained the distinct traditions of their culture, and actively utilized the differences and the diversities of in it to transform their respective brands and express their regional or national cultural identity.

*Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* utilized the Latin American cultural identity in its products by

supporting the artisan spirit and the traditional culture. They were able to develop and revolutionize their products by re-interpreting indigenous design methods in a modern way. Also, they were successful in establishing a unique brand identity by achieving a humanistic and ethical business model that provided education, work environment and profit sharing that was fair and equal.

Though the two brands were evaluated due to their similarity as brands that utilize the Latin American cultural identity, there were differences in the areas they differentiated themselves in as well as the methods of application and the degree of use. *Taller Flora* is a designer brand with modern sensibilities that emphasized the artistic vision of Carla Fernandez by using unique pattern arrangements to show built-in silhouettes and multi-faceted clothes, while *Fábrica Social* leans towards a social organization. It simply applies traditional decoration techniques in its products, and is focused on manufacturing its products such as the fabrics with patterns made through traditional weaving techniques, bags, earrings, and other accessories through a fair trade network.

As the fashion industry becomes more homogenized and uniform through globalization, this case study of *Taller Flora* and *Fábrica Social* will hopefully be useful in finding ways to better express one's cultural identity in fashion as well as advance the industry as a whole.

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