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Underwater basketweaving: A reimbursable vocational trade?

Ima Pfoul

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California State University
San Bernardino

UNDERWATER BASKETWEAVING:
a reimbursable vocational trade?

A Project Proposal Submitted to
The Faculty of the School of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree
of
Master of Arts
in
Education: Vocational Option
by

Irena Pfohl, MVE
San Bernardino, California
June 1988

Approved by:

_________________________
Advisor

_________________________
Committee Member
California State University
San Bernardino

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Objective

The Objective

The objective of this project is to measure the productivity of the underwater basket weaving (UWBW) cottage industry in California, and to determine the national demand for underwater baskets (UWBs).

Context of the Problem

UWBW as a craft has increased in popularity during the last decade. This ancient craft first arose in California when surfers, sidelined by sunburn or flat seas, needed a vocation by which they could sustain themselves. A core of dedicated surfers immersed themselves in the ancient craft of UWBW near Laguna Beach during the 1970s and sales of these unique baskets expanded to the point where Smith-Blarney (1979) suggested that "basketry of the underwater derivation, may prove to be the growth industry of the 80s".

This has proven to be the case as Ricardo (1985) reports that "few American households may be found where the underwater basket does not adorn the family aquarium, and families and neighbors often vie for the most unique and aesthetically appealing form."

This interest in the UWB has been reflected in crime statistics since 1982. Currently, the UWB is the third most stolen item in California, behind BMWs and condoms. The black market value of stolen UWBs in Los Angeles County alone was estimated to be in excess of six million dollars in 1986 and in San Francisco nine murders in 1986 were UWB related. Predictably,
home and property insurance rates have escalated for UWB owners during the last five years and life insurance rates are currently being adjusted for UWB owners.

It is clear from the preceding paragraphs that underwater basket weaving (UWBW) is a vital, vibrant force in the California culture and economy, and that production of these heirloom craftspieces cannot exceed current demand.

The great demand for UWBs is unlikely to be met by current production methods, and attempts at mechanization have largely been unsuccessful. Goldberg, (1982), for example, attempted to build a marine, underwater UWBW plant in Marin County but the corrosive effects of seawater have thwarted her efforts.

The lack of mechanization in terms of UWB productivity, however, has been less a factor than the fact that UWBW training is almost non-existant. To date UWBW training has been conducted more like an apprenticeship in a medieval crafts guild than as a modern vocational training program. No ROP, community college, or university program exists in California, and many practitioners of the craft seem to indicate that there is a real need for some form of organized training. For example, when queried if he felt more UWBW training was necessary, surfing champion Rod Rad replied, "Fer sure, bitchin' idea, RAAADI!". (Chessman, 1985)

Unfortunately, the training is unavailable. Due to definitions of state and federal code, (AB2235 and PL94-482), there must be a demonstrated need by industry for training to be funded by either federal or state monies. These statistics must be complied and reported by either the state or federal Departments of Labor, and neither has shown a need for UWBW craftspersons.
The primary reason for this lack of a demonstrated need for UWBW craftspeople has been that there is no industry to hire workers in this field—**ALL** UWB production occurs at solitary proprietor worksites—almost always within 100 yards of where large, predictable waves are breaking.

There are signs, however, that 'the times, they are a-changin'. K-TEL enterprizes has developed a UWB shop (called a surfshops by aficionados much as the garmet district in New York had sweatshops). In this semi-organized arrangement, novice UWBWs, (some cannot surf at all), complete UWBs begun by master craftspeople. Thus far quality has been quite good, some standardization of the product has occurred, but the prized aesthetic appeal of the unique UWB has been reduced by the process.

To sum, UWBW is a cottage industry which appears to be on the brink of mass production and some form of industrialization. Training of UWBW entrepeneurs and workers would enhance the local economies of UWBW sites and serve the demonstrated material needs of the nation.

However, state and federal funds are unavailable to help initiate UWBW training precisely because UWBW is that cottage industry, and there is **no** measurable job demand for UWBW workers. This demand for workers by industry is a necessary prerequisite for securing federal or state monies for training.

There is, however, a 'backdoor' of sorts for securing federal funds for training new and emerging technogies under the 1984 Perkins Act (PL96-728). By demonstrating a public need for the product and measuring the industry's capacity for production, funds for training entrepreneurial and worker skills may be secured.
Problem Statement

The problem is that the underwater basket market has never been measured and the productivity of the cottage UWBW industry is unknown.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project, therefore, is to measure the current production capacity of the UWBW cottage industry and to determine nationwide demand for the product.

Research Questions

Current Production Capacity

1. How many UWBW craftspeople are currently manufacturing UWBs?
2. How many UWBs are produced per year? (per person, per week, etc.)
3. Where are the UWBW sites?
4. Are there any UWBW craftspeople that manage a mass production enterprise producing UWBs?

Market Demand

1. What percentage of the nationwide population would purchase UWBs of a given quality?
2. What price would these customers pay for the product?
3. Would any of these customers make regular, multiple purchases of UWBs?
4. How many of these people own UWBs?
5. What stylistic appointments are influential in purchasing?
Definitions

Surfer
1. One whose primary lifestyle involves the sport of surfing; 2. the hedonistic pursuit of sea, sunshine and a life of ease; 3. one who performs the graceful, acrobatic dance called surfing on a six foot long buoy and board while being propelled at up to 45 mph towards beach, rocks and ultimate destruction.

Surfing
1. The sport of riding a ocean wave.

UWB
A basket made of kelp, manufactured and used entirely underwater. The UWB can only survive for extended periods of time if kept under marine water. Deterioration begins as soon as exposed to the air.

UWBW
1. The process by which UWBs are constructed; 2. the craft of building UWBs.

Assumptions

It is assumed that:

1. UWBW is a craft which can use mass production techniques to produce multiple, high quality baskets.

2. There is an unlimited amount of the raw materials of UWBs. This material, kelp, is easily accessible, costs little to harvest and is a renewable resource.

3. UWBW is not environmentally harmful and the byproducts of UWBW production are not harmful to workers or consumers.

4. Questionnaire research reliably produces valid information on the preferences of the respondents.

Delimitations

1. Production surveys are limited to California. Productivity of the South Pacific islands are unknown.

2. Nationwide surveys of the UWB market are tenuous at best. No assumption of the vagaries of the long-term market for UWBs are made.
Limitations

This study is limited by:

1. the highly mobile lifestyle of the UWB producer, the surfer.
2. the paucity of research into underwater manufacturing.

Summary

This introductory segment of the project, UNDERWATER BASKETWEAVING, a reimbursable vocational trade?, has identified the problem to be addressed, has briefly argued why and how federal and state monies may be used to train UWBW workers and entrepreneurs and has outlined some of the basic reservations one must have pertaining to research on this topic.

Organization of the Remainder of the Project

The remainder of the project will include, a comprehensive review of the literature of UWB production and research, a section on the methodological innovations used in the process of conducting this research, a section on the data analysis and finally a section on conclusions. A comprehensive bibliography will follow and a complete appendix provided.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature of underwater basket weaving (UWBW) will proceed in the following fashion; first, a history of UWBW will be developed, followed by a chronology of events pertaining to the role of the UWB in the American surfing scene. After completing the historical perspective of the UWBW phenomena, a summary of the research and writings on the market for UWBs will be provided. Next, prior assessments of the UWBW cottage industry will be provided and the chapter will conclude with a technical treatise on UWBW materials, construction and design. At the conclusion of the chapter, a summary will be provided.

The Prehistoric Record of Underwater Basketweaving

The roots of UWBW lies in the myths and rites of the Polynesian cultures of the South Pacific Islands. It may be assumed that UWBW first appeared around the lagoons of the tropical atolls and islands where the pearl bearing molluscs and oysters prevail. Moirian legend has it that Andrew the magnificent first dove for pearls for the beautiful maiden, Brooks in the Blue Lagoon of Moire. Unfortunately, Andrew was unable to snorkle and carry oysters at the same time (a fact which led to some comment from the local ne'er-do-wells), and consequently Andrew was singularly unsuccessful with either pearls or Brooks. Brooks soon departed with a blue-eyed, blonde God of unknown origin and Andrew was left in despair. Despondent beyond consolation, Andrew threw himself into the sea, hoping to drown. In the depths, however, Andrew discovered a mystical sea turtle, tangled in the village nets, and the turtle offered to teach Andrew,
The Islands of Moire

The Roaring Twenties
"that which he sought", if he would free the turtle. Andrew cut the nets from the turtle and was taught the skills of UWBW. Andrew thereupon gathered more pearls than the entire village combined, and his strings of pearls attracted much feminine attention. Even the avaricious Brooks returned and attempted to reclaim Andrew's attentions. Andrew, however, had become wise as well as successful and chose the reticent, but far more beautiful Matilda to share his reed mat. Andrew became the village teacher, eventually acquired tenure, and led the Moireans to become the dominant pearl producers in the South Pacific, an economic attribute which still prevails. (Mead, 1921, et al)

The Historical Record of Underwater Basketweaving

The Isle of Moire has been the center of pearl and therefore, UWBW, production for hundreds of years. When British ships first brought european goods to trade for pearls in the 1800s, however, buckets with ropes soon replaced the utilitarian UWB and the craft of UWBW nearly died out. (Cooke, 1905) In the rites and ceremonies of the Moirean culture, however, the craft of UWBW continued despite massive changes from successive invasion of eastern and western culture. Missionaries had sought to eliminate UWBW because the rituals through which UWBs were constructed were viewed as pagan, and the frenzied courtship behaviors which accompanied these rituals were seen as immoral. Colonization by the British in 1842 removed the tribal chieftains from positions of power and British bureaucrats impounded all UWBs for exhibition in the galleries and museums of London and Europe. The small pox epidemics of the 1860s killed an estimated 63% of the native population in a three year period, and successive measles, syphilis and mumps infections also killed thousands.
By 1890 the native population of Moire had declined from 200,000 in the 1840s to just of 10,000. Moreover, the Moirean culture had lost its island. Today, ownership of the arable land of Moire is 35% British, 42% American and 16% Japanese. Native ownership of land in Moire is just 7% and this land is marginal in its capacity to produce crops.

In 1905 the rituals and ceremonies forbidden for sixty years were again permitted, and UWBW began anew. Few skilled craftspeople survived, however, and much of the pre-colonial craftwork cannot be duplicated. More tragically, many of the pilfered UWBs in the museums of Europe were stored and displayed improperly and these priceless treasures were lost or severely damaged.

The British maintained Moire as a colony until the outbreak of World War II when the Japanese used its fine ports at Spock’s Landing, Piento and Safe Harbor as fleet ammunition and supply depots. Native Moireans fled Japanese labor camps and escaped to the Shydeer Hills and the Blackhorse Mountains where they assisted Allied forces by providing intelligence information to fleet headquarters. In 1944, as the war was drawing to a close, native pearl divers used UWBs as luggage for mines which they attached to Japanese ships at anchor in Piento. The subsequent sinking of all Japanese vessels allowed American forces to take Moire without the loss of a single serviceman.

Moire was understandably a favorite of the South Pacific for servicemen from then on and the peacetime force which remained on Moire until 1950 soon learned the native arts of surfing and incidentally UWBW, although the former was most enthusiastically adopted. In 1949 Moire was formally granted its independence from Britain.

During the late 1950s and early 60s, the veterans of WWII began to
bring their families to Moire for vacations to relive their past and illustrate to their children the glory that had been theirs. Adolescents soon picked up the native sport of surfing. The finest surfing on the island was located on the beaches of the states of Norhemplia and Booklands. There on the northern coasts were also located the finest oyster beds and UWBW flourished there as well. Shortly thereafter, UWBW appeared on the coast of California, near Laguna Beach.

A Chronology of Events in UWBW in California

1958 First UWB produced in California. (approximately)

1962 Brian Wilson immortalized UWB by singing Surf City (basket case)

1963 Lou Reed awarded the first prize for a UWB in the Huntington Beach annual Art Extravaganza.

1965 UC Berkeley begins a program in UWB appreciation.

1966 Stanford, UCLA and USC follow with programs of their own.

1968 President Lyndon Johnson was presented a UWB produced by Ronald Reagan as a symbol of the vibrancy of the Californian culture.

1970 The University of California system begins a systemwide competition for UWBW.

1973 The British Museum finds 17 UWBs in exceptional condition in a brined solution in a pickle barrel in Bushey Heath near Heathrow International Airport.

1978 The Rockefeller Collection, the largest collection of its kind is opened for the first time for public viewing. California UWBs constitute 13% of the total show.
1979 A collection of 25 California UWBs are given by President Jimmy Carter to Mozuran Prime Minister S. Berkley Ismead.

1982 Goldberg attempts to develop a UWB factory off the shores of Laguna Beach, California.

1984 K-TEL enterprizes forms a mass production facility in Orange County, California.

The Market for UWBs

The market for UWBs has been progressively improving. Durer, 1987 reports that UWBs are the brightest star on the investment market for short term financial return. Demand on the spot market has shown remarkable resiliency and relatively immune to the effects of changes in interest rates and currency exchange. On the international scene, UWBs are the fifth most valued commodity and the rate of balance of payment deficits have shrunk 3% due largely to the introduction of UWBs into the international marketplace.

Despite this rosy outlook, relatively little is known about the national or international market for UWBs. Barron's (1986) reports that "market research for UWBs on the local, state, national and international scene should be conducted, indeed, it should be a national priority of the Reagan administration."

Assessments of the UWB Cottage Industry

There has been very little assessment done of the UWB cottage industry. During the sixties, when radical young people clustered at the universities and beaches of California, the CIA conducted a surveillance of the UWB and surfing cultures. Little pertaining to the industry, per se, was
revealed and the cottage industry remained uninvestigated until 1982 when Goldberg began her ill-fated adventure into underwater manufacturing.

Goldberg began her UWBW venture with the grandiose idea that she could duplicate the skills of the surfers by employing weaverfish to skein the wet kelp through pre-manufactured UWB bodies. Unfortunately, Goldberg's training and housing apparatus were not able to sustain the corrosive aspect of seawater for more than six weeks at a time, and the production level of the weaverfish, although quite high, was never enough to cover the costs of production.

Training the weaverfish to weave appropriate patterns was initially a problem as well because the male weaverfish traditionally weaves a foursquare pattern attractive to female weaverfish and the UWB pattern that Goldberg chose was sufficiently similar to the weaverfish's that a mating frenzy occurred and a number of baskets were produced which were commercially unusable.

K-TEL enterprizes of Orange County, California has had more success in the development of a mass production technique whereby novice surfers finish the UWBs of their masters. As mentioned earlier the main problem of this attempt at mass production has been that the baskets are no longer virtuoso performances, but rather clones of the same pattern, shape and weave.

Summary

The review of literature began with a condensation of prehistorical knowledge about the Moirean culture and its relationship with UWBW. The historical record of UWBW was then detailed and a brief excursion into the literature of marketing the UWB was discussed. A brief synopsis of
business and manufacturing considerations of the UWB production was included and formed the concluding element of the chapter.
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section will detail how the proposed project will be carried out. First, the research questions outlined in the introductory section will be restated. Next, the research design will be described and the populations to be sampled will be outlined. Following this, a description of the research setting will be provided and a calendar of events developed. A sampling scheme will be designed, and how data is to be collected will be unveiled. Next, the manner in which the instruments will be validated will be revealed. Following this, a plan for the protection of human subjects, as well as for the analysis of the data will be provided, and finally, the section will conclude with a summary.

Research Questions

Current Production Capacity

1. How many UWBW craftspeople are currently manufacturing UWBs?
2. How many UWBWs are produced each year? (per person, per week, etc.)
3. Where are the UWBW sites?
4. Are there any UWBW craftspeople that manage a mass production enterprize producing UWBs?

Market Demand

1. What percentage of the nationwide population would purchase UWBs of a given quality?
2. What price would these customers pay for the product?

3. Would any of these customers make regular, multiple purchases of UWBs?

4. How many of these people own UWBs?

5. What stylistic appointments are influential in purchasing?

Research Design

The design of the proposed project is twofold. First, with regards to determining the productivity of the UWBW cottage industry, a physical count of all of the UWBW sites in California will be conducted by student workers. The remaining data will be collected by person-to-person interviews at each of those cites. State sales tax information from coastal states will supply an accurate indication of the number of UWBW sites in other states and productivity estimates will be extrapolated from the California data. Funds from a grant from the California State Department of Education has been secured to conduct this portion of the study.

For the second aspect of this study, the marketability of the UWB, a nationwide telephone survey will be produced. Approximately 1,000 individuals will be polled to determine the answers to the research questions postulated above. The Society for the Promotion of Underwater Basket Weaving has agreed to underwrite the costs of this telephone survey.

Populations and Sampling

During the first part of the study, that portion of the study dealing with the productivity of UWBW sites, all California sites will be polled to determine their productivity. State sales tax information from other
coastal states likely to produce UWBs will be referred to to determine how many other UWB producers there are across the nation. Extrapolation from the complete California data should yield a highly accurate, reliable picture of the productivity of UWBs across the nation.

UWB producers are almost exclusively, surfers, and as such, maintain a rather nomadic lifestyle. Although most may be found within 300 yards of the ocean, surfers have been found as far as 10 to 15 miles inland, if fast food is not locally available. Moreover, many surfers go through a periodic molt during which the omnipresent ‘board’ is replaced with a bookpack during the fall. The lifespan of the adult surfer is abbreviated and in many the baggies which adorn the successful surfer is often replaced before the thirtieth birthday with the mark of old age, a three-piece business suit. Due to these anomalies of the population, any information gathered is highly susceptible to change.

In the second portion of the study, the determination of the marketability of the UWB, a national sample must be secured. The national population has a number of ethnic, cultural, economic, geographic factors which make the population highly heterogeneous. Consequently, the sample size is quite high. Twelve hundred people must be interviewed in order for this portion of the study to be reliable and valid. Telephone interviewing using randomly generated phone numbers will be the manner of data collection. Naturally, those without telephones will be excluded from the sample, and this group without phones may prove to be a different subset of the population. However, those who do not have telephones are assumed to constitute such a small portion of the population that their omission will be insignificant.
Research Setting

The setting for the majority of the project is the campus of the California State University, San Bernardino. Telephone interviewing will be conducted in AD301, a room specifically designed for telephone interviews which consists of 10 dedicated WATTs lines, specialized phones developed specifically for interview research and comfortable, and booths and chairs highly appropriate to this research.

For the productivity research, the setting is the coastline of California where surfers congregate. For this portion of the study, student workers will have to visit each surfing site. Transportation will be provided by the researcher in the form of rental cars.

Calendar of Events

The events of this research proposal will occur on the following dates and in the following order:

October 87 Secure university permission to use human subjects.
November 87 Write marketability survey.
November 87 Write the productivity questionnaire.
December 87 Pilot test the marketability survey.
December 87 Pilot test the productivity questionnaire.
January 88 Secure a bank of telephones.
January 88 Hire productivity surveyors.
Feb-Mar 88 Conduct the productivity survey.
March 88 Generate random telephone numbers proportional to population size in each area code.

March 88 Hire telephone interviewers.

April 88 Train telephone surveyors.

April 88 Conduct telephone interviews.

May 88 Input data into the Cyber 720 system.

May 88 Run data analysis using Crosstabs, Frequencies and Histograms from Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

June-July 88 Analyze the data.

August 88 Write conclusions.

Sampling Scheme

Sampling in the productivity segment of the study will proceed as outlined above. Sampling for the telephone interview will proceed in the following fashion. A microcomputer program will be written to generate random telephone numbers. Population proportions from each area code will be used to determine what proportion of the 1200 total in the sample to call in each area code. One hundred and seventy-five randomized phone numbers will be generated for each area code. Telephone interviewers will phone sequentially down the list of random numbers until the necessary number of contacts in each area code is made.
Data Collection

Data will be collected by the interviewer as the information is provided. Data will be recorded on the General Purpose Answer Sheet (Appendix A).

Validation of the Instruments

A pilot study of 25 disparate individuals to determine if there are noticeable differences in response to the items in the marketability survey. This study will be conducted in a face-to-face manner, and 10 calls will be placed to local numbers to determine the workability of the instrument.

The productivity questionnaire will be administered to 25 graduate students in a research class to determine readability, clarity, non-redundancy and validity.

Protection of Human Subjects

In accordance with California State University policy, human subjects will be debriefed by reading or being read the following passage.

Your participation in this study, although of considerable importance, is entirely optional. There are no consequences to non-participation, but you should realize that educational decisions will be made based on the results of this study. This is a chance to be influential. All information gathered in this study is entirely confidential. Should you require it, a copy of the abstract of the results of the study will be provided.

Analysis of the Data

Analysis of the data will proceed in the following manner:
1. Data will be input by optical scanner into the Cyber 720 system at CSUSB.
2. Data will be compiled using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences subprograms Crosstabs, Histograms and Frequencies.

3. Tests of significance will be conducted to determine if areas of the country offer different responses to items or if productivity differs across production sites.

Summary

The methodology section has proceeded in the following fashion: First research questions were outlined, then the research design was discussed. A description of the research setting was provided and a calendar of events developed. The sampling scheme was planned and a data collection scheme was revealed. Finally, a paragraph was written to protect human subjects and an analysis of the data planned.
References


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