

How to identify local flagship craft(s)? Practical guidelines through the selection process

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Introduction

In this session, we will guide you **through the process of selecting the 'flagship craft'**. To help you succeed, we will introduce you to **tools for identifying and amplifying values** based on local cultural heritage. We hope this will make the selection process for the further development of your micro area easier and more considered.

We understand the flagship craft as one that is strategically exposed for the purposes of tourism, local identification, project work, social and cultural activities and a set of values would support the selection process to have an impact on the listed staff. We would also like to help reflect the conditions and needs of your local community and government to make effective and well-reasoned decisions.

It is evident that tourist programs, representations, festivals and the valorisation of handicrafts are the result of a complex interplay of different actors, enthusiasts, politics and other stakeholders. These must be included in the decision-making process. It is crucial to emphasise that this decision is arbitrary, determining where your community should focus its energy, efforts and capacities.

For addition, let us also clear what do we mean by cultural heritage. It refers to the practices, objects and other components of material, social or spiritual culture from the past that, in principle, are used to construct/constitute the cultural identities of a particular community in contemporary life. The management of cultural heritage is usually imposed in a top-down model, i.e. from specialized institutions to their knowledge holders, and carries ideological and political meanings; it can change the social power of the actors involved or the perception of certain cultural phenomena. Cultural heritage is not something that already exists but becomes so when we name it and believe it to be so. In this sense it is a performative expression.

So, the selection process can be initiated either from the top down or from the bottom up. For example, the UNESCO list for the recognition and preservation of intangible cultural heritage requires this process to be initiated by a local community of practice (such as local associations, craftspeople, or knowledge holders), but it can also be proposed (at least informally) by political actors (city council, head of the tourist office, local museum etc.) who wish to expose key aspects of the local handicraft tradition.

We believe that starting with reflection and conducting research at the beginning of this process could produce sustainable and enjoyable results and well-built content for local development.

Values

Let's start by reflecting on the main values which we will incorporate in the selection of your flagship craft. Starting from the broader to more specific:

Community: This refers to the inclusion of the younger generation, active labourers, pensioners and other socially vulnerable groups, as well as social organisations, small enterprises and local government. The aim is to build a local ecosystem that fosters the valorisation of local heritage.

Localness: This value, like the previous one, applies to embracing sustainability and providing a sense of local sovereignty and sufficiency (in a social, economic and material sense). This includes engaging with the local community and service providers, sourcing local materials where possible, providing local distribution to shorten transport routes and connecting with local knowledge.

Interpretation: Local practices can certainly have an identity-forming significance, which may be perceived differently by residents and visitors. This is why it is important to share knowledge and interpretations when presenting aspects of residents' everyday lives or symbols of identification. We recommend incorporating the value of good interpretation practices from personal (e.g. storytelling) and institutional (e.g. museums, tourist centres, festivals) perspectives.

Cultural landscapes: Building on the previous point, a cultural landscape can be about experiencing the place as a valuable entity. How do residents describe, live in and connect with the place and its landscape in geographical, historical and contemporary terms? How do they live with their cultural heritage? How do they live with their cultural heritage? How is it inscribed in space, agriculture, in cultural and social life, education, tourism, civil life and wellbeing? The answers to these questions can provide a good starting point for interpreting local practices and the interpretation of the place as an added value.

Handcrafting process: Bear in mind that artisanal work has specific characteristics and values that can be considered in your projects, such as slow processing of materials, care for environment, small production runs, local distribution, preservation of specialized knowledge and skills (including design and manufacturing), and consideration of limitations and adaptations according to market (buyer) needs. This is possible thanks to boutique, personalized production.

Discussion

Work with your group of colleagues on your project, in your local community or organisation. Sit down together and brainstorm the main values you would like to incorporate into your project. You can either choose from the proposed values or come up with your own. Perhaps **focus most of your efforts on the section about experiencing cultural landscapes**, as this will highlight your particularities and inform the selection process. Also bear in mind the **important question of who your heritage is relevant to and why**.

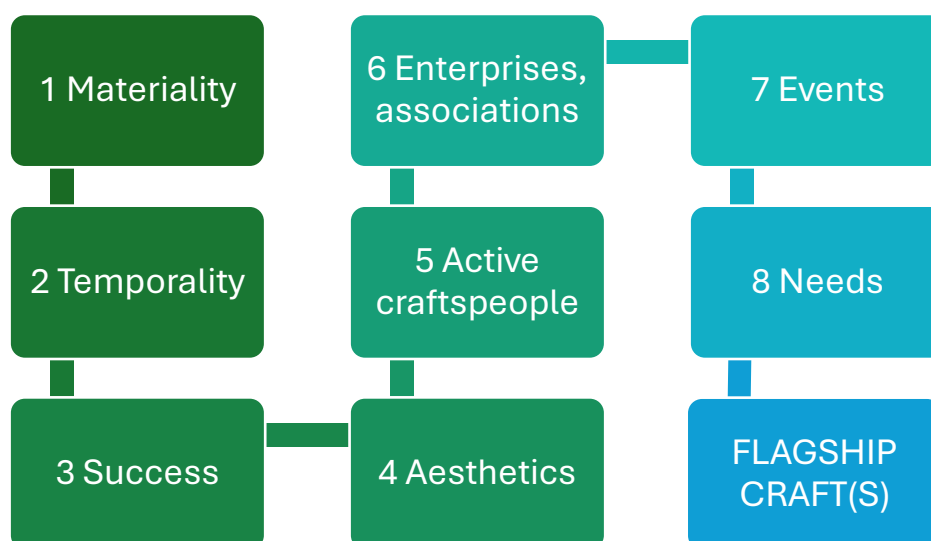
Selection process

We suggest moving on to the practical part, selecting the key flagship craft(s). If it is easier for your workgroup, you can choose more heritage crafts in your area, at least for the first phase of the process. Later on, we suggest evolving the process in detailed field research if in doubt which to develop further (see the fourth step of the Chapter 3).

Vision: To select at least one **flagship craft** (more is always an option) for further development to enhance cohesion in local community, tourism (and thus local economy), to serve as meaningful content in projects. To put it also other way: to position your place on tourist map with handicrafts being one of the tools. We will ensure guidance throughout four work steps: checking and discussing the scheme to identify what already exists with criteriums; identifying the flagship craft(s); reflecting the selection (political aspects) and providing plan for further research and develop.

First step: Identification of existing handicrafts practice in the infrastructure

Check and discuss the scheme to identify what already exists. Having more experts in your workgroup would be beneficial, as it would enable you to cover more aspects.



1 Materiality: Which materials are (or were) abundant in your area? Consider natural resources, geography and agriculture, for example stone, wood, branches, wool and clay. You can also describe main cultural attributes, pastoralism or herbalism for instance. Even if materials are no longer used in contemporary production, they still have a symbolic impact on the cultural landscapes of the past. It is clear that other materials must be purchased, and this is perfectly understandable in the 21st-century production mode.

2 Temporality: Which handicrafts were integral to everyday life or festive occasions in the past? Are there is any manufacturing facility in the vicinity connected with handicraft production? How were crafts adapted to contemporary life? Are there any new crafts that have emerged in the last decade? Does any handicraft practice represent outstanding continuity? For example, local family workshops, a local folk festival or any custom that falls under the broader category of intangible cultural heritage. Years of practice can bring expertise, knowledge, virtuosity and

significance to a place. However, it is important to consider new or adapted crafts when making your selection. It is not necessary to restrict your search to the field of 'surviving' crafts.

3 Success: Are there any local craftspeople who can make a living from their work? Do people buy and use their products? What are the products used for? Do their products promote the local environment and area?

4 Aesthetics: Handicraft products bring specific (and often emblematic) forms and aesthetics to the fore. Are there any typical patterns, qualities or forms of items that are particularly well-known in your area? What do you consider to be your shared heritage or heritage-influenced practices or products? Think especially of creations by artisans who specialize in their crafts. Make a list to consider at the selection stage.

5 Active craftspeople: Perhaps this is the most important point to tackle. Which local craftspeople are currently active? Do they do it for a living or as a hobby? Which (demographic) generations do they belong to? Do they offer apprenticeships or workshops to others? You could briefly describe each of their profiles to give an overview of their practices, which may vary.

6 Enterprises and associations: Identify local associations or informal groups of people who meet to make crafts, for example, and list enterprises and economic projects and branded products in the field of cultural heritage. This will help you to identify potential knowledge holders and enthusiasts for further research and activities.

7 Events: Are there any annual events, such as festivals, trade fairs, gatherings or exhibition openings, that focus on cultural heritage, crafts or folk art? Are there any continuous workshops (for professional qualification or as hobby program) that focus on these topics?

8 Needs: Which needs in your area could be met by selected flagship crafts? For example, tourism development (souvenirs, experiences and events); community cohesion (workshops, gatherings and knowledge transmission within the education system or for leisure time); professional representation or development (museums, interpretation centers and exhibitions); and identification symbols in general (especially for the local government).

Second step: Identify the flagship craft(s)

Please use the discussion to review the information you have gathered. Your objective is to provide an answer to the following question: **what constitutes representative (i.e. flagship) craft for your place/area?**

When considering a potential candidate, two key criteria should be considered: **frequency and exceptionality**. In the first case, a widespread craft may thrive due to the: 1) easily accessible material, 2) low-tech manufacturing process or 3) geographical conditions. In this instance, the assumed craft is evident on multiple occasions in the responses provided to the initial stage of the process. In other cases, the flagship craft can also be selected by exceptional significance – it is not present in other places, but perhaps practised by only a few local craftspeople. It is important to note that existing infrastructure for handicrafts should be utilised instead of attempting to revive craft practices that are no longer in use. Following this, please make an initial decision about your focus and **select up to three flagship crafts**.

Third step: Reflect the decision

Cultural heritage is chosen in the present based on past events and contemporary needs. Bear in mind that, as active participants in the tradition-making process, you have **responsibility for your decisions**.

Taking responsibility means **considering the contemporary needs** of cultural and political actors, social and economic processes, and local society. It means **thinking about the impact** of your decisions, resolving ethical issues along the way, and ensuring **transparent reasoning behind your choices**. For instance, consider the impact on local people and knowledge holders. What are the potential implications of this choice, and will they be positive or negative? The primary question is whether it will serve to empower the community or merely confer prestige upon a select craftspeople. Think about their representation, authorship rights, increased demand for purchases, and the preservation of complex skills and knowledge. Will the choice be embraced by the local community? If in doubt, you could hold a public presentation or discussion about the process. Cultural heritage can indeed be seen as cultural capital and as having potential for the future in terms of local development and entrepreneurship. However, we should deal with it in an inclusive and responsible way.

Fourth step: What to do next?

In conclusion, we recommend taking two further actions in the future: Firstly, **ethnographic work** to deepen your knowledge and understanding of handicraft practice, and secondly, **development projection**.

For the research, you could bring together local experts in fields such as geography, history, sociology, ethnology and anthropology to assist with the fieldwork and desk research. Local museum workers are usually very helpful and resourceful, as are other cultural workers and enthusiasts. You can collect material in various formats (photos, videos, archives and testimonies), visit active craftspeople, conduct interviews and observe the production process to gain an understanding of the difficulties involved and develop realistic expectations.

Development projection, on the other hand, involves formulating plans and calibrating them to meet needs in areas such as museum programmes, cultural centres, tourism programmes, the economy, local politics, improving social life and the educational system. In the Commheritour project, we advocate a similar approach to the valorisation of heritage crafts. For further information, please refer to the following link: <https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/commheritour/library>.