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CRAEFT

Policy Recommendations

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Executive summary

This policy brief addresses the critical need to sustain and evolve traditional crafts in Europe by leveraging technological advancements, fostering innovation in education and training, and implementing supportive policy frameworks. Traditional crafts embody centuries of knowledge and cultural narratives, offering unique value to local economies and contributing to Europe’s cultural identity. However, rapid technological changes, shifting consumer preferences, and economic pressures pose significant challenges to their preservation and growth.

The recommendations in this brief are informed by a comprehensive review of current challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that preserves cultural authenticity while integrating modern practices. Key proposals include:

Technological Integration: Promote the adoption of digital tools, including 3D scanning, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), and e-commerce platforms to support craft preservation, innovation, and market reach.

Educational Innovation: Revise curricula to incorporate digital technologies, gamified learning experiences, and immersive platforms that engage new generations and facilitate the transmission of craft knowledge.

Policy Frameworks: Advocate for policies that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, protect intellectual property, and promote the circular economy and eco-certifications in the craft sector.

These recommendations aim to empower craft practitioners, foster educational and technological advancements, and create a resilient and sustainable craft sector aligned with contemporary societal and environmental imperatives.

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Abbreviations

AR	Augmented Reality
CH	Cultural Heritage
CNC	Computer Numerical Control
ECHY	European Cultural Heritage Year
EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
TCs	Traditional crafts
PGI	Protected Geographical Indication
TSG	Traditional Specialty Guaranteed
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VR	Virtual Reality
VET	Vocational Education and Training



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1. Introduction

Traditional crafts (TCs) represent a vital component of Europe's Cultural Heritage (CH), embodying skills, creativity, and historical narratives passed down through generations. Beyond their cultural value, they contribute to local economies, tourism, and community identity. However, TCs are increasingly under threat due to globalization, technological advancements, and changing consumer preferences. As artisans face the erosion of traditional knowledge and economic pressures from mass production, there is an urgent need for strategic interventions that balance cultural preservation with modern innovation.

Digital technologies have emerged as powerful enablers for the preservation, education, and dissemination of TCs. Tools such as 3D scanning, photogrammetry, and Virtual or Augmented Reality (VR/AR) offer unprecedented opportunities to digitally capture, preserve, and share traditional techniques and artefacts. These technologies not only ensure the longevity of craft practices but also make them accessible to wider audiences, including researchers, educators, and the general public. Moreover, immersive learning environments and virtual apprenticeships have the potential to revolutionize craft education by providing interactive and flexible learning experiences.

Education plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of TCs. Traditional master-apprentice models are increasingly challenged by economic and social changes. Digital learning platforms and gamified experiences provide new ways to engage learners and ensure the transmission of craft knowledge to future generations. By integrating digital tools into educational curricula, craft schools can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, fostering innovation while preserving heritage.

Policy frameworks at the European and national levels are essential for sustaining TCs. Cultural policies must evolve to support the integration of digital technologies, promote cross-border collaborations, and ensure the financial and intellectual property rights of artisans. The adoption of sustainability principles, such as circular economy models and eco-certifications, is also critical for aligning TCs with global environmental goals.

This policy brief proposes a holistic approach that combines technological innovation, educational advancements, and supportive policy measures to ensure the future relevance and resilience of TCs. By weaving together the perspectives of artisans, educators, policymakers, and researchers, it offers a comprehensive roadmap for sustaining Europe's rich craft heritage.



2. Context and Issue

Traditional crafts in Europe represent not only a reservoir of CH but also an essential component of regional economies and community identity. However, the survival and vitality of this sector face numerous challenges driven by economic, technological, and social transformations. The decline of skilled artisans and the generational gap in transmitting traditional knowledge are particularly concerning trends.

Generational and Knowledge Transfer Issues: Younger generations are increasingly drawn to technology-oriented careers, leading to a shortage of new apprentices willing to inherit and perpetuate traditional craft techniques. This decline disrupts the critical intergenerational knowledge transfer that has traditionally sustained crafts. Addressing this gap requires new educational models, including the integration of digital platforms and immersive learning environments.

Market and Economic Pressures: The craft sector faces mounting competition from mass-produced goods, often perceived as cheaper and more accessible alternatives. These economic pressures have weakened the market for handmade products and marginalized artisans. Additionally, the undervaluation of craftsmanship further contributes to the decline of the sector.

Opportunities from Technological Integration: Despite these challenges, technological advancements present significant opportunities for revitalizing traditional crafts. Emerging tools, such as 3D scanning and AR, have demonstrated their potential to document and preserve intricate craft processes while engaging younger generations in craft learning. Furthermore, digital marketplaces and e-commerce platforms are transforming how artisans reach and connect with global consumers.

Sustainability and Environmental Concerns: Craft practices are increasingly scrutinized for their environmental impact. The adoption of circular economy principles and the promotion of eco-certifications can align traditional craft practices with modern sustainability goals. Examples such as the use of eco-friendly materials in Spanish craft industries demonstrate the viability of sustainable approaches.

Policy and Support Structures: Fragmented policy frameworks have hindered comprehensive support for traditional crafts. There is a pressing need for cohesive and forward-thinking policies that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, provide financial and technical support, and foster cross-border networks for sharing best practices.

Given these complex challenges and opportunities, strategic interventions are essential to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of traditional crafts in Europe. The next sections of this document will provide detailed recommendations to address these issues and promote the integration of crafts into modern economic, technological, and educational frameworks.



3. New Technologies

The integration of new technologies presents significant opportunities for addressing the challenges faced by the traditional craft sector. Digital tools have the potential to modernize production processes, streamline operations, and foster creative innovation, all while preserving cultural authenticity.

Digital Fabrication and Automation: Automation technologies, including computer numerical control (CNC) machining and 3D printing, allow craft practitioners to replicate intricate designs with greater precision and efficiency. These tools reduce the time and labour required for certain processes while enabling artisans to focus on more creative and value-added aspects of their work.

AR and VR: Immersive technologies, such as AR and VR, are transforming how traditional crafts are taught, demonstrated, and experienced. AR can provide step-by-step guidance overlaid on physical objects, while VR offers fully immersive environments where learners can practice craft techniques remotely.

E-Learning Platforms and Digital Knowledge Repositories: Online learning platforms are expanding access to craft education and training. Through video tutorials, interactive workshops, and gamified learning experiences, these platforms bridge geographical barriers and attract a wider audience to craft learning. Digital knowledge repositories also play a crucial role in documenting and preserving traditional techniques.

Data Analytics and Market Insights: Data analytics tools can help craft practitioners understand market trends, consumer preferences, and sales patterns. This information empowers artisans to tailor their products to meet market demands and improve their marketing strategies.

Blockchain for Provenance and Authenticity: Blockchain technology offers a secure and transparent way to track the provenance and authenticity of craft products. By providing consumers with verifiable information about the origin and production process, blockchain can enhance trust and value in artisanal goods.

Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Innovations: Technological advancements are also contributing to more sustainable craft practices. Digital tools can optimize material use, reduce waste, and suggest eco-friendly alternatives. Innovations such as IoT-enabled monitoring systems can help artisans adopt more energy-efficient production methods.

By embracing these new technologies, the traditional craft sector can adapt to contemporary market demands, attract new generations of practitioners, and ensure the long-term preservation and evolution of CH.



4 Policy recommendations

It is important to note that the role of European policy in safeguarding and reviving TCs is important, by supporting and enhancing existing best practice examples and providing the framework and resources necessary to address challenges and foster opportunities. By offering funding, creating incentives, and facilitating cross-border collaboration, European policies ensure that crafts remain integral to CH and economic development.

4.1 Support traditional crafts through existing funding and collaboration opportunities

4.1.1 Funding and Incentives

The financing mechanisms are at the core of European support for TCs, and a multitude of programs exist to address financing barriers and encourage innovation. Probably one of the flagship programs in this regard is Creative Europe, which provides grants for projects that safeguard CH, contribute to the creative industries, and encourage innovation in TCs. It helps craft organizations and craftsmen in the development of new products, digitalization, and better market access.

Also important are the substantial contributions through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, which invest in the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the craft sector. Through these, the artisans modernize their ateliers, which invest in sustainable materials and help them access the international market. Specific national schemes in countries such as Greece, France, and Spain, through EU funding, underpin subsidies of training programs, enhancing local infrastructures related to crafts.

Incentives for Artisans: The use of sustainable practices and digital technologies is encouraged by incentives tailored for artisans. Tax breaks and grants for green initiatives, like using eco-friendly materials or reducing energy consumption, would be in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. Similarly, programs like Horizon Europe facilitate research and innovation, enabling craftspeople to explore new techniques and materials that integrate traditional skills with modern advancements.

Expanding funding opportunities: Future policy efforts could consider expanding the scope of funding to include micro-grants tailored specifically for small, independent artisans who lack access to larger funding schemes. These grants could support early-stage innovation, participation in trade fairs, or joining collaborative networks.

4.1.2 Cross-border Collaboration and Recognition

European policy also fosters cross-border collaboration, recognizing that CH transcends national boundaries. Initiatives like the European Heritage Label and UNESCO's Intangible CH program highlight crafts with significant cultural value, promoting international awareness and cooperation. These designations not only celebrate crafts but also encourage shared strategies for their preservation and promotion.

The Erasmus+ program plays a critical role in enabling mobility and knowledge exchange among artisans, educators, and researchers. For example, partnerships between craft schools in Limoges, Ioannina, and



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CERFAV have facilitated the exchange of best practices, the development of joint training modules, and collaborative innovation projects.

Policy frameworks also emphasize the harmonization of standards, particularly for certifying and labelling artisanal products. The Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) labels ensure that TCs maintain their authenticity while gaining recognition in broader markets. These labels enhance consumer trust and provide economic benefits by positioning crafts as premium goods.

Strengthening Collaboration Networks: To bolster collaboration, the European Union promotes regional and thematic networks such as the European Network of TCs and ECHY (European CH Year) initiatives. These platforms connect stakeholders, fostering dialogue and facilitating the sharing of technological, educational, and policy-related resources.

Developing Craft Incubators: As an additional recommendation, the creation of craft-specific incubators across Europe could provide emerging artisans with access to shared tools, mentorship, and market insights. These incubators could serve as hubs for innovation and training, combining traditional skills with advanced manufacturing techniques and sustainable practices.

4.2 Invest in training and capacity building

Training plays a pivotal role in preserving TCs, ensuring that skills are passed on to future generations. Policies should emphasize integrating crafts into formal and informal education systems, promoting their cultural and economic value.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs: Establishing specialized VET programs that blend traditional techniques with modern technology can attract younger generations. For instance, programs could include modules on digital marketing, e-commerce, and sustainable production practices, equipping artisans with tools to thrive in contemporary markets.

Public awareness campaigns: Raising awareness of the cultural significance of TCs through public campaigns can increase interest and participation. Policies could support initiatives such as exhibitions, documentaries, and digital storytelling platforms that showcase the stories and skills of artisans.

Integrating technology into TCs provides an opportunity to enhance productivity, improve quality, and expand market access while respecting the authenticity of the craft. Creating and supporting digital platforms where artisans can showcase and sell their work directly to consumers can help them reach a global audience. These platforms can include virtual tours of workshops, detailed product narratives, and customization options.

4.3 Supporting Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, which emphasizes the exploration and appreciation of TCs and heritage, can significantly contribute to both the preservation and revitalization of TCs. European policies could focus on several key recommendations to enhance cultural tourism while ensuring the sustainability of TCs.

Developing specialized craft tourism routes: To promote cultural tourism, it can be encouraged the development of dedicated craft tourism routes that highlight regions known for their artisanal heritage. By creating thematic itineraries that connect various craft hubs across Europe, tourists would have the opportunity to engage with crafts in an immersive and meaningful way.



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Supporting cultural festivals and events: Cultural events such as craft fairs, festivals, and artisan workshops have a significant role in both promoting TCs and attracting tourists. The EU could provide funding and logistical support for these events through programs like the European Regional Development Fund and the Creative Europe program.

4.4 Implementation Strategies

The use of pilot programs is an approach to gradually integrate technology into vocational training for traditional crafts. Pilot programs allow stakeholders to test, refine, and demonstrate the effectiveness of technology integration in a controlled, manageable environment before scaling up.

Projects that integrate technology in selected traditional crafts to test, refine, and demonstrate the approach are recommended through partnerships between vocational training centres, technological companies, and cultural institutions to support technology integration, including sponsorships, mentorships, and collaborative projects.

A training program tailored to the specific needs of the pilot, focusing on both the technological aspects and the enhancement of traditional skills. This would include capacity-building sessions for educators and craft communities to support the program beyond the end of its pilot phase.

The experimentation within the framework of pilots should be encouraged, as participants are very likely to come up with new ideas on the ways that technology can be used or new products, due to their individual and diverse backgrounds.

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework is recommended to assess the impact of pilots. Qualitative and quantitative data on skill improvement, production efficiency, market reach, and participant satisfaction and their analysis are recommended to identify the most efficient approaches. Moreover, the results of such an analysis should be used to refine the pilot approach before scaling up the program to include more participants, different crafts, and additional technologies.



5 Short-term versus long-term measures

To support TCs and ensure their sustainability, a dual approach is proposed. Short-term recommendations focus on actions that can be implemented within a year to address immediate needs. Long-term recommendations aim at creating structural changes and fostering resilience over time.

5.1 Short-Term Policy Recommendations

Immediate Funding and Incentives: European and national funding bodies should prioritize direct financial aid to artisans and craft organizations. This can be done through grants for urgent needs like upgrading tools, adopting sustainable materials, or improving workshop safety. Programs such as *Creative Europe* and national cultural funds can be leveraged to ensure rapid disbursement of resources.

Promotion of E-Commerce Platforms: Digital platforms should be established or expanded to support artisans in accessing broader markets. Public-private partnerships can create user-friendly marketplaces that highlight the uniqueness of TCs while connecting artisans with global consumers. This approach has already shown success with Ioannina silversmiths selling heritage designs online.

Enhancing Cultural Tourism: Increased support for craft workshops, festivals, and museum-led initiatives can boost tourism revenues. Regions like Yecla in Spain and Tinos in Greece have already demonstrated the potential of linking crafts with tourism to attract visitors and generate income for artisans.

Rapid Skill-Transfer Programs: Short-term apprenticeship schemes facilitated by museums and craft schools can address the immediate need for knowledge transfer between ageing artisans and younger generations. These programs can be funded under Erasmus+ or similar frameworks to encourage rapid implementation.

Eco-Certifications and Labels: Fast-tracked certification processes for eco-friendly crafts, such as Fair Trade or regional sustainability marks, can help artisans differentiate their products in competitive markets while promoting sustainable practices.

5.2 Long-Term Policy Recommendations

Structural Investments in Education and Training: Over the next 3–5 years, investments should focus on curriculum development and the establishment of specialized training centres. Institutions like the Limoges School of Fine Arts and CERFAV in France offer models that can be replicated or adapted across Europe. Apprenticeship programs supported by these centres will ensure intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Sustainable Resource Management Frameworks: Policies encouraging the use of eco-friendly materials and circular economy principles must be embedded in craft practices. For instance, incentives for adopting FSC-certified wood in Spain or recycling glass at CERFAV can become widespread standards.

Cross-Border Collaboration: Long-term efforts should build on initiatives like the European Heritage Label and UNESCO's Intangible CH program. These efforts must go beyond recognition, fostering deeper collaboration among artisans, researchers, and educators across member states. Joint projects funded under *Horizon Europe* can integrate technological advancements with traditional techniques.

Standardization of Craft Certifications: Harmonizing Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) labels will help maintain authenticity and improve marketability.



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Establishing a central European registry for certified crafts will enhance consumer trust and streamline certification processes.

Integrating Craft into Broader Policy Agendas: Crafts should be a central focus in European Green Deal initiatives, with incentives for reducing carbon footprints and promoting local resource use. Policies addressing rural development and urban regeneration should also prioritize craft activities as engines of economic and cultural revival.

Digital Integration in Education and Production: Long-term investments in digital tools like AR/VR for training and design will modernize craft education while preserving traditions. Creating centralized digital repositories for ethnographic recordings, 3D scans, and instructional videos will ensure that future generations have access to craft knowledge.

Building Regional and Thematic Networks: Sustained collaboration can be achieved by strengthening existing networks like the European Network of TCs. Regional hubs should be established, facilitating resource sharing, policy alignment, and the collective promotion of crafts at international levels.

Funding mutualization schemes: The financing of these mutualization schemes could be based on a combination of public and private sources, as part of territorial development and CH preservation policies. European funds, notably through the Creative Europe and FEDER programs, could be mobilized to support the acquisition and development of spaces, while local authorities could contribute by making buildings available or granting tax breaks. A hybrid economic model, including the participation of artisans in the form of contributions adapted to their income, income generated by tourism and educational activities, and support from private sponsors, would ensure the sustainability of these structures. This collective approach would also give craftspeople greater visibility and strengthen their ability to respond to contemporary challenges while preserving the authenticity of their practices.



6. Conclusion

The sustainability of TCs is closely tied to the social and economic well-being of artisans and their communities. Individual artisans face the dual pressures of preserving tradition while adapting to a globalized market. This underscores the necessity of adopting modern technologies, such as 3D scanning, e-commerce platforms, and virtual demonstrations, to expand market access and preserve skills. However, these advancements come with challenges, including the need for technical training and financial investment.

At the community level, the decline of TCs often results in a loss of cultural identity and local pride. Conversely, revitalizing crafts can strengthen communities, enhance tourism, and foster a sense of place. To thrive, artisans require robust community-based support systems, including training facilities, cooperative structures, and local investments. Engaging younger generations is particularly crucial. While crafts rely on historical methods and aesthetics, they must also adapt to remain relevant in modern contexts. A careful approach is needed to use technology as an enhancement rather than a replacement. Sustainable practices also demonstrate how tradition and innovation can align.

6.1 Comparative Analysis

In Japan, traditional crafts are protected as "Intangible Cultural Properties," with strong state support for training and market development. South Korea's National Intangible Heritage Center and China's initiatives to integrate crafts into global markets provide models for structured preservation and commercialization. The decentralized policy approach in the United States, where nonprofit organizations like the American Craft Council support crafts, contrasts with European models. Canada's emphasis on Indigenous craft preservation highlights the importance of inclusive cultural policies. Peru and Ghana provide examples of integrating crafts into sustainable tourism initiatives and global trade frameworks, emphasizing local craftsmanship's cultural and economic value.

6.2 Aligning Policies with Broader Sustainability Goals

European policies on CH must align with global sustainability goals, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Craft practices intersect with goals related to decent work (Goal 8), sustainable communities (Goal 11), and responsible production (Goal 12). Policymakers can support TCs by incentivizing sustainable materials and practices, providing funding mechanisms that reduce carbon footprints, and promoting renewable materials. Aligning craft policies with the European Green Deal ensures that TCs contribute to environmental sustainability while preserving CH.

Sustainable practices should be incentivized to encourage the use of eco-friendly materials and techniques in TCs. Establishing consistent standards for recognizing artisanal quality, as seen with the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) labels, can harmonize efforts across Europe. Inclusive policy design, where artisans actively participate in policy formulation, is essential for bridging legislative frameworks with the practical needs of the craft sector.

6.3 Key Insights

Digital tools, such as 3D scanning and virtual reality, hold transformative potential in documentation, education, and market expansion for TCs. These technologies enable artisans to preserve intricate craft processes while reaching global audiences. Sustainability efforts, including the adoption of eco-friendly



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materials and circular economic models, are vital for ensuring the longevity of crafts. Policy frameworks and funding mechanisms must align with grassroots needs to effectively support TCs. Additionally, cross-border collaborations, recognition programs, and training initiatives offer valuable pathways for empowering traditional craft sectors and fostering innovation.

6.4 Key Recommendations

Artisans should adopt digital technologies to preserve skills, engage younger generations, and reach global audiences. They should also forge partnerships with educational institutions and museums to support skill transmission and innovation. Furthermore, community-driven initiatives, such as cooperative models, can amplify artisans' visibility and market access, helping them thrive in evolving markets.

Educational institutions should develop curricula that integrate traditional techniques with modern tools to better prepare students for contemporary challenges. The expansion of virtual and AR applications can bridge geographical and generational gaps in knowledge sharing. Successful programs, like CERFAV and the Limoges School of Fine Arts, exemplify how balancing technical rigour with artistic creativity fosters innovation.

Policymakers must integrate TCs into broader cultural and economic sustainability agendas. Increasing funding for research, training, and market development—particularly in areas related to sustainable practices and digital tools—is vital. Promoting cross-border collaborations and establishing enhanced recognition mechanisms, such as certifications and quality labels, will further empower TCs. Craft-focused initiatives that address both legislative and grassroots needs will help sustain and elevate traditional crafts.

6.5 Future Directions

In the future, the EU should explore the long-term impact of digitization on craft preservation, authenticity, and market dynamics. Investigating how digital technologies can create inclusive training and collaboration platforms is vital. Additionally, developing economic models that emphasize sustainability and circularity tailored to TCs can provide new pathways for artisans to thrive while minimizing environmental impact. Comparative studies across regions can identify best practices for funding, training, and cultural promotion. Evaluating the efficacy of existing European and international policies on TCs can inform the co-definition of future strategies. Finally, interdisciplinary studies connecting TCs with tourism, urban development, and contemporary design could highlight innovative applications of craft heritage in modern contexts, ensuring that TCs continue to evolve and contribute meaningfully to Europe's culture and economy.