



care, judgment, dexterity

P4 - Community, methodology and results

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<http://www.craeft.eu/>

Executive summary

The European crafts ecosystem faces significant structural challenges, including declining practitioner numbers, weakened intergenerational transmission, limited digital integration, and increasing competition from industrial production. In response, the Craeft project seeks to bridge traditional craftsmanship and digital innovation through the development of a multi-stakeholder Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP). This paper presents the conceptual foundation, methodological development, and pilot results of the Craeft Community, a digital forum designed to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, knowledge exchange, and long-term sustainability within the crafts sector.

Grounded in the theory of Situated Learning and Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the platform reinterprets the traditional craft guild in a digital context. Initially structured around material-based categories, the forum was reconfigured into five transversal thematic pillars—Understanding & Valorisation; Authenticity & Safeguard; Transmission & Training; Economics & Innovative and Sustainable Business Models; and Documentation & Archiving—following stakeholder feedback and analysis of digital engagement patterns. This restructuring enabled cross-disciplinary exchange and positioned the Community as a central dissemination and collaboration hub embedded within the madineurope.eu portal.

Quantitative and qualitative findings from the pilot phase indicate emerging engagement, particularly in areas related to training and skill transmission, while also revealing ongoing challenges such as the “Effort vs. Engagement Gap” and language barriers. The study demonstrates that a stewarded digital environment can operationalise apprenticeship-based learning models in contemporary online settings, contributing to cultural heritage preservation, economic resilience, and the development of hybrid professional identities at the intersection of craft and technology. The Craeft Community thus advances the state of the art by moving beyond niche craft forums toward an inclusive, interdisciplinary ecosystem that supports systemic sector transformation.

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Abbreviations

GIs	Geographical Indications
EU	European Union
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
CH	Cultural Heritage
CoP	Communities of Practice
VCoPs	Virtual Communities of Practice
IG	Instagram
VR	Virtual reality

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
Document history	3
Abbreviations	4
Table of contents	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Existing efforts	9
2.1 Theoretical Background	9
2.2 Mapping the VCoPs in the Crafts Sector	10
3 Methodology.....	14
3.1 Initial Structure	14
3.2 Restructuring.....	16
3.2.1 Widening topics	17
3.2.2 Sustainability.....	17
3.3 Overview of the Pillars	18
3.4 Tools and Technologies.....	19
3.4.1 Wireframe	20
3.4.2 Pages and Navigation.....	21
3.4.3 User Experience	25
3.4.4 Joining Community	25
3.4.5 Privacy and Security	26
3.4.6 Access, Roles, and Governance.....	27
4 Engagement	29
5 Results	32
5.1 Quantitative Results.....	32
5.2 Qualitative Results	32
6 Conclusion.....	34
6.1 Significance	34
6.2 Limitations and Future Work	35
Annex A	36
References	40

1 Introduction

The European crafts ecosystem faces significant threats. Key challenges include a declining number of practitioners, a critical lack of intergenerational succession plans, and increasing competition from industrial supply chains, including imitations of genuine, authentic work. In addition, there is a noted deficiency in business, digital, and management skills among traditional artisans, combined with a lack of formal certification and recognition for their expertise.

The Craeft project aims to address these issues by merging traditional craftsmanship with cutting-edge digital technologies to preserve heritage for "posterity and prosperity"¹. To achieve this, the project is structured around three interconnected levels:

1. Observation and study: Close interaction with artisans to study embedded craft knowledge.
2. Analysis and understanding: Processing and making sense of this documented knowledge.
3. Development of digital tool: Creating digital resources designed to strengthen and support the craft sector.

The Craeft Community Pilot is one of the digital tools developed, tested, and implemented within the project's third level, which focuses on the development of digital tools. The pilot's core task is to design, test, and implement a dynamic and inclusive digital forum that supports knowledge exchange and collaboration within the European crafts ecosystem called the Craeft Community.

The Craeft Community is designed to be an interactive and dynamic platform that fosters knowledge sharing, collaboration, and engagement within the crafts and cultural heritage sectors. It is built to serve as a space where professionals, researchers, and enthusiasts can connect, discuss pressing issues, share expertise, and explore new developments in the field. The objectives of the forum are to exchange on the ongoing initiatives in the crafts ecosystem, to promote innovation as well as sustainable practices and advanced education formats, and to animate a network of players committed to the safeguarding and valorisation of craft.

The primary objective of the Craeft Community is to create a collaborative online environment that facilitates discussions around key topics related to crafts and, hence, intangible cultural heritage (ICH). By providing a dedicated space for dialogue, the forum aims to:

Encourage knowledge exchange: The forum will act as a central hub for the exchange of information, research, and best practices in the craft sector. This will include discussions on methodologies, tools, and new technological advancements, such as the Craeft Protocol for documenting craft knowledge.

Facilitate collaboration: The forum will connect like-minded individuals and organisations, creating opportunities for partnerships, joint projects, and initiatives. By promoting cross-border and cross-disciplinary collaboration, the forum aims to encourage a more integrated approach to heritage preservation and crafts education.

¹ Craeft Website. Home page: <https://www.craeft.eu/>.



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



Promote inclusivity and participation: The forum will be open to a wide range of stakeholders, including craft professionals, researchers, students, heritage organisations, and enthusiasts. Its inclusive nature will ensure that all voices are heard, regardless of geographical location or professional background. It will facilitate the gathering of bottom-up information, which is crucial to better understand the challenges of the sector.

Raise awareness of key initiatives: The forum has the potential to serve as a promotional tool for relevant projects, studies, and other EU-funded initiatives. By providing a space for exchange and visibility, the forum aims to amplify its impact and attract additional stakeholders who can contribute to the success and outreach of these initiatives.

The Craeft Community serves both as a resource for information and as a space for active participation. Members can use the forum to:

Access expert content: The forum will host articles, case studies, research papers, and event updates related to crafts and cultural heritage. This content will be curated to ensure relevance and quality, providing valuable resources for those looking to deepen their understanding of the field.

Participate in discussions: Members will be encouraged to start discussions, ask questions, and share insights on topics of interest. Discussions will be moderated to maintain a constructive and respectful environment, with clear guidelines for participation.

Network with other professionals: The forum provides members with opportunities to connect, fostering networking within the community.

Initially, the forum was structured around craft materials, such as glass, wood, textiles, etc. While this organisation highlighted the unique techniques and traditions associated with each material, it posed limitations in addressing cross-disciplinary topics and fostering broader engagement. Following a comprehensive review and feedback, the forum was restructured to better align with the needs of the craft ecosystem and ensure long-term sustainability.

As part of this transformation, the forum was renamed “Craeft Community”, replacing “Craeft Communities”, to emphasise a single, cohesive entity rather than fragmented silos of contributors. The new name reflects an inclusive collective that brings together diverse members beyond material-specific divisions. The redesigned Craeft Community forum is now organised into five thematic pillars, which emphasise the platform’s commitment to embracing a wide range of objectives, perspectives, disciplines, and experiences across the crafts sector:

1. **Understanding & Valorisation:** Exploring the cultural, social, and economic value of crafts.
2. **Authenticity & Safeguard:** Protecting authentic craftsmanship and territorial heritage.
3. **Transmission & Training:** Encouraging innovative educational approaches and preserving skills.
4. **Economics & Innovative and Sustainable Business Models:** Enabling sustainable practices and attracting new generations.
5. **Documentation & Archiving:** Preserving crafts through advanced documentation techniques.

The paper provides an in-depth overview of the development, restructuring, and implementation of the Craeft Community forum. It outlines the rationale behind the redesign, highlights its key features and



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



thematic focus, and details the forum's role in supporting the crafts sector. By fostering collaboration and promoting innovative approaches, the Craeft Community aims to play an important role as a unique place for exchanging dialogue about crafts in Europe with a wide range of contributors.

The unique contribution of this research lies in its transition from a traditional, fragmented craft landscape toward a unified, digital, multi-stakeholder, and most importantly interdisciplinary ecosystem known in literature as a "Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP)" [11].

Key contributions to the field include:

- **Multi-Stakeholder framework.** Unlike niche forums that are tailored only to specific artisans, the Craeft Community creates a unique space where artisans, researchers, policymakers, IT/AI players, and educators interact. This allows for an interdisciplinary dialogue involving experts from computer science, anthropology, and law to address the sector's complex challenges.
- **Thematic pillars.** The paper proposes organising the content around five strategic thematic pillars. These pillars are intended to function as transversal frameworks through which cross-cutting priorities, such as sustainability and innovation, are embedded and addressed across multiple topics, rather than treated as standalone themes. This structure supports integrated discussion, encourages interdisciplinary exchange, and better reflects the interconnected nature of contemporary craft practices.
- **Central dissemination.** The platform is designed to function as a central dissemination hub for craft-related knowledge, results, and outputs from EU-funded projects.
- **Sustainability.** By embedding the forum into the existing madineurope.eu portal, the research provides a model for the long-term viability of project-based digital tools, ensuring the community remains active beyond the initial funding period.

At its core, the Craeft Community reinterprets the traditional craft guild for the 21st century, turning the internet into a new guild that functions as a meeting place for the many professions linked to crafts: from makers and researchers to educators, technologists, and policymakers. United through a shared and inclusive digital space.

2 Existing efforts

Before positioning the Craeft Community within the broader landscape of digital knowledge exchange in the crafts sector, it is essential to examine both the theoretical foundations and the practical precedents that inform its development. Over the past decades, scholarship on situated learning, Communities of Practice (CoPs), and, more recently, Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs), has provided a conceptual framework for understanding how knowledge is collectively constructed, shared, and sustained. At the same time, numerous online platforms dedicated to crafts and cultural heritage have emerged, offering spaces for peer exchange, documentation, and professional networking. However, these initiatives vary significantly in scope, structure, and stakeholder composition. This chapter, therefore, explores the theoretical underpinnings that guide the Craeft Community (Section 2.1) and maps selected existing virtual communities within the crafts and heritage sectors (Section 2.2), to clarify how Craeft aligns with, builds upon, and diverges from current models.

2.1 Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of the Craeft Community is grounded in the concept of "Situated Learning," a term introduced by Lave and Wenger in 1991 [12]. Their theory undertakes a radical rethinking of learning, moving away from the "tyranny" of assuming learning is merely the mental processing and absorption of factual information. They developed the concept while studying apprenticeship as a learning model, observing that learning is not merely a relationship between a master and a student, but a complex set of social relationships. Therefore, Lave and Wenger concluded that learning is, in its essence, a social character that is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice [13].

A Community of Practice (CoP) are defined as *"a group of people who share a concern, strong interest or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly"* [13].

While the term is relatively recent, the phenomenon of people learning together in shared domains, such as traditional craftsman guilds or tradesmen's societies, is an old way of transmitting skills and an old shape of a learning environment. Even before craftsman guilds or tradesmen's societies, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder state that communities of practice appear as early as the first human groups, dating back to the times when we lived in groups in caves and when practical knowledge was exchanged through communal discussion and shared experience around the cave fire [14].

Three crucial characteristics, elements built and define the *CoP*:

"The Domain: A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership, therefore, implies a commitment to the domain and, therefore, a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

The Community: In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other.



The Practice: The development of a shared repertoire of resources, stories, tools, and experiences to solve recurring problems relevant to the domain” [13].

Of particular relevance to the Craeft Community is the authors’ emphasis that a website in itself does not constitute a CoP; it only assumes the role of a Community of Practice when its members actively interact, share experiences, and learn together.

Another important distinction in the literature is drawn between “*learning curriculum*” and “*teaching curriculum*” [12, p.97]. A learning curriculum is understood as a set of situated opportunities for participation in practice, seen from the learner’s perspective [12, p.93-97]. It emerges from the community itself and is not defined through prescriptive rules or instructions. By contrast, a teaching curriculum is deliberately designed for instruction and often supplies and therefore constrains as a structuring resource, framing knowledge through an external interpretation of what counts as knowing [12, p.97].

The Craeft Community Pilot follows the logic of a “*learning curriculum*” by allowing the Craeft Community to be the only stewards and creators of the knowledge to be shared and transmitted.

The advancement of digital technologies and wide access to the Internet have extended these traditional learning models into virtual environments, forming the Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs). Howard Rheingold was the first person to define the VCoPs as social aggregations in cyberspace where personal relationships form through sustained public discussion [15].

In the digital environments, the absence of a physical space is filled by the role of a “Technology Steward” [16] individuals who understand a community’s needs and take leadership in selecting and configuring the digital tools that serve as the community’s workspace. The Craeft pilot builds upon existing virtual CoPs (such as Ravelry or The Engraver’s Cafe) but introduces a novel, multi-stakeholder space. While many online platforms serve as “new manuals” by sharing patterns and designs, Craeft distinguishes itself by bringing together artisans, researchers, and policymakers to address the crafts sector’s broader challenges, from certification, low consumer awareness, and sustainable business models.

Additionally, scientific literature distinguishes CoPs from Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) [2]. While CoPs often emerge naturally through passion and practitioner identity, PLCs are often intentionally built through institutional structures to improve specific outcomes like organisational efficiency. According to this distinction between the two, the Craeft Community is more accurately defined as a Professional Learning Community, as it was specifically designed and established to advance and improve the crafts sector. Even though it did not emerge naturally as CoPs do, its sustainability and members’ participation are voluntary, and sustaining them requires, as Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder argue, “*generating sufficient excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members*” [14]. While the management of such spaces can support their longevity and stimulate participation, the clarity and relevance of the community’s purpose remain essential. The purpose of the VCoPs also defines the digital tools that the “Technology Steward” [16] will apply.

2.2 Mapping the VCoPs in the Crafts Sector

Before designing the Craeft Community, we conducted a mapping of existing virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) within the crafts sector, as well as a selection of platforms and networks connected to



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



the broader field of cultural heritage. This preliminary research aimed to identify relevant structures, engagement models, and governance approaches, allowing us to learn from established examples and understand both their strengths and limitations. The insights gained through this process informed the conceptual and functional development of the Craeft Community, ensuring that it builds upon proven practices while addressing existing gaps in knowledge exchange, collaboration, and visibility within the sector.

It is important to note that our mapping activity was limited to online English-speaking communities, and there are likely many additional VCoPs operating in other languages. Craft communities are often closely tied to specific linguistic contexts, even though the sector itself strongly relies on visual forms of communication, such as photos and videos, which enable a high degree of non-verbal knowledge exchange. For instance, in the case of *Engravers Café*, we are aware through our contacts that the platform is also used by non-English speakers, who often rely on online translation tools, which enable them to participate in discussions and share their work.

Name of the VCoPs	Link	Focus of the forum	Additional comments
<i>Galzy</i>	https://glazy.org/	Community for glazing; they document photographically	We learned about the forum directly from craft professionals who actively use it during our participation in the Bornholm Symposium organised by the Hephaestus project.
<i>Engravers Café</i>	https://engraverscafe.com/whats-new/profile-posts/5430499/	Metal engraving	This forum is actively used by the MDE engraving members. We heard about it from two different engravers.
<i>Ravelry</i>	https://www.ravelry.com/account/login	Fiber arts	Identified through desk research
<i>LumberJocks</i>	https://www.lumberjocks.com/	Woodworking, furniture making, joinery	Identified through desk research
<i>Needle'n'Thread</i>	https://www.needlenthread.com/patterns	Embroidery	Identified through desk research
<i>Handweaving</i>	https://handweaving.net/	Hand weaving	Identified through desk research
<i>Ganoksin / Orchid Forum</i>	https://orchid.ganoksin.com/	Metalsmithing, mainly jewellery making	Identified through desk research
<i>Leatherworker</i>	https://leatherworker.net/forum/	Saddlery, holster making, and fine leather goods	Identified through desk research



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



<i>iForgeIron</i>	https://www.iforgeiron.com/	Blacksmithing, bladesmithing, and foundry work	Identified through professional blacksmithing circles.
<i>Glass Art Society</i>	https://www.glassart.org/	Glass, glass blowing	Identified through desk research
<i>TKGA Circle</i>	https://tkga.org/tkgacircle-community-a-new-home-for-knitters-everywhere/	Exclusively for professional knitters.	Just for members. Hosted by The Knitting Guild Association. High-level technical peer review by Master Knitters.
<i>KnittingHelp Forum</i>	https://forum.knittinghelp.com/	Knitting	Identified through desk research
<i>Knitting History Forum (KHF)</i>	http://knittinghistory.co.uk/	Knitting, heritage and history revival	An international network of researchers and makers. They hold an annual online conference (last held Feb 7, 2026) where they present historical reconstructions.
<i>European Heritage Hub</i>	https://www.europeanheritagehub.eu/	Cultural heritage	The MDE team knows about it. Shred by Europa Nostra.

In addition to dedicated platforms that function as online spaces for VCoPs, there is also a significant number of Facebook groups that effectively operate as communities of practice. Similarly, numerous Instagram accounts, particularly those focused on knitting, crochet, and embroidery, play an increasingly important role in knowledge exchange and peer learning. This reflects a notable revival of these crafts, especially among younger audiences, predominantly women aged 25-40, where such practices are re-emerging both as hobbies and, gradually, as professional pathways. Many of these practitioners use their social media profiles, often in combination with personal websites, not only to showcase their work but also to share making processes, tutorials, and sell patterns. These hybrid models of engagement blur the line between informal learning environments and professional practice. It is also important to highlight that knitting, in particular, has developed one of the most robust digital ecosystems within the craft sector.

Private Slack or WhatsApp groups often function as informal VCoPs, particularly among non-professional or emerging cultural heritage practitioners. As noted by a member of the MDE team, who participates in several such groups, one particularly active example is the European Heritage Youth Ambassador Programme [17] (now referred to as NextGen Heritage Ambassadors), which connects approximately 50 ambassadors. From an insider perspective, discussions within this network primarily focus on opportunities in built heritage, relevant conferences, interesting developments in the field, and professional exchange.



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



To conclude, our observations indicate that many existing VCoPs in the crafts sector tend to be highly specialised, often centred around a single craft, with craft professionals forming the core user base. A broader application of the VCoP model emerges when communities are organised around specific materials or techniques, for example wool, which then allows for the inclusion of multiple craft practices and knowledge systems. In contrast, VCoPs linked to cultural heritage display a different pattern. These communities are generally more diverse and inclusive, bringing together researchers, students, heritage professionals, and members of the general public with an interest in heritage. However, the scope of discussion tends to remain largely within the domain of cultural heritage, particularly built heritage, while only marginally addressing intangible cultural heritage, and rarely engaging with crafts as one of the forms of ICH [8].

3 Methodology

The development of the Craeft Community followed a design-based and iterative methodology, combining mapping exercises, stakeholder feedback, digital behaviour analysis, and platform prototyping. Rather than adopting a purely technical approach, the methodology integrated theoretical insights from Communities of Practice (CoP) and Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) with empirical data collected from craft professionals and heritage stakeholders. The process unfolded in several phases: (1) mapping existing virtual craft communities and digital habits, (2) designing an initial material-based structure, (3) evaluating its limitations through stakeholder feedback and survey results, and (4) restructuring the platform into a thematic, multi-stakeholder model aligned with the project’s long-term objectives. This section outlines the evolution from the initial structure to the final conceptual and technical framework.

3.1 Initial Structure

Following the mapping exercise, the initial organisational structure of the Craeft Community was designed to align with the established principles of craft-related forums, which typically focus on specific materials or specific craft professions and their associated know-how. Consequently, the forum was initially organised around a material-based categorisation, with discussions and resources divided into distinct craft areas, as: Glass Community; Porcelain Community; Clay Community; Marble Community; Wood Community; Silver Community; Wool Tapestry Community and Wool and Cotton Textiles Community.

This structure was chosen to highlight the distinctive techniques, traditions, and tools associated with each of the materials, allowing for in-depth exploration of specific domains.

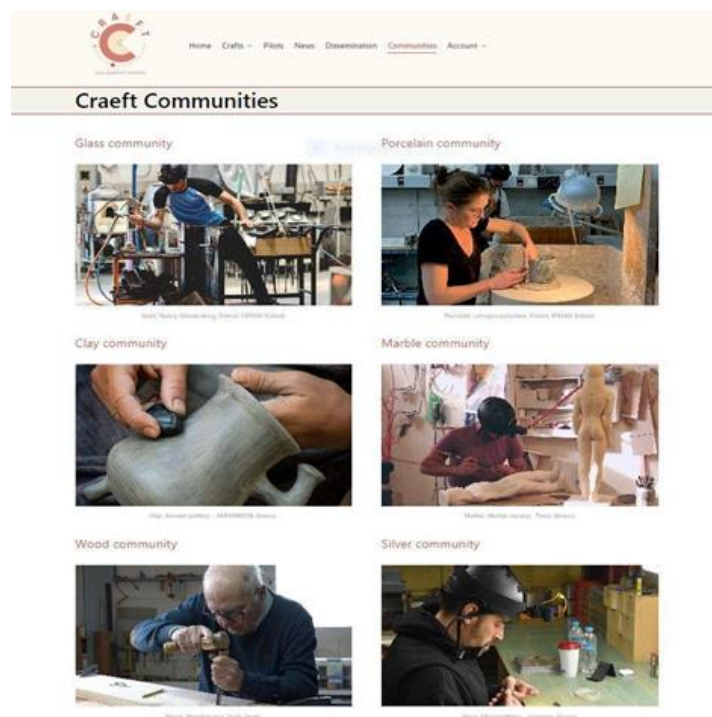


Figure 1. Former Craeft Communities forum structure.



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



Additionally, the forum was named “Communities” rather than “Community” to emphasise the diversity of its members. Each group was intended to interact independently within different virtual spaces, with each space dedicated to a specific material.

While the material-based categorisation provided a clear and straightforward organisational framework, it posed several challenges:

Limited engagement across disciplines: The rigid silos of information created by material-based divisions limited opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration. Many overarching themes relevant to the crafts ecosystem, such as sustainability, innovation, and education, could not be effectively addressed within this structure.

Redundancies in content: The division led to duplication of information between the main Craeft website and the posts within the Craeft Community Forum. This overlap reduced the uniqueness and added value of the Forum.

Challenge of the main target: This structure was primarily designed to attract crafts professionals by focusing on their specific materials and techniques. However, it proved challenging to engage these professionals, who often prefer established platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or craft-specific forums, making it difficult for the Craeft Communities to become their primary hub for interaction. It is important to highlight that while the Forum is exclusively available in English, many European crafts professionals are accustomed to communicating in their native languages, which may discourage active participation in the Craeft Community Forum.

Competing with established craft-specific forums: By researching existing craft-specific forums, it became evident that competing with well-established and highly functional platforms posed significant challenges. For instance, platforms like Engraver's Cafe or Facebook-based groups that operate as forums have already garnered dedicated user bases by providing highly targeted, niche content tailored to specific crafts. These platforms are excellent in offering expertise, resources, and community engagement focused on singular crafts, such as engraving, which resonates deeply with their audiences.

In contrast, the Craeft Communities forum initially aimed to serve as a multi-disciplinary forum, hosting discussions across a wide range of materials and techniques. This broader scope, while ambitious, inadvertently diluted the platform's perceived expertise in any specific craft area. Users seeking detailed, craft-specific knowledge may not have regarded the forum as their go-to resource, as it lacked the singular focus that defines and drives engagement on these niche forums.

Furthermore, the broader scope made it difficult to establish credibility as an "expert" in any single craft discipline. The diversity of materials and techniques represented on the platform, ranging from glass and porcelain to wood and textiles, was intended to foster inclusivity and cross-disciplinary dialogue. However, it became clear that this approach, while valuable in theory, made it harder to position the forum as a trusted authority for professionals deeply immersed in any one craft. This realisation underscored the importance of restructuring the forum to focus on thematic, cross-cutting topics rather than attempting to replicate the singular expertise and community engagement already achieved by existing craft-specific forums.

Additionally, MDE, the leader of the Craeft Community pilot, conducted research, in collaboration with FRH, that gathered valuable data on the digital skills and habits of craft professionals across Europe. This survey provided critical insights into how crafts professionals engage with digital platforms and the types of tools they prefer to use. The findings from this research, about the digital behaviour of crafts practitioners, served as an additional factor in the decision to restructure and redesign the Community forum. By enlarging the target audience to several communities and addressing a wider scope, the team was able to refine the platform's approach.

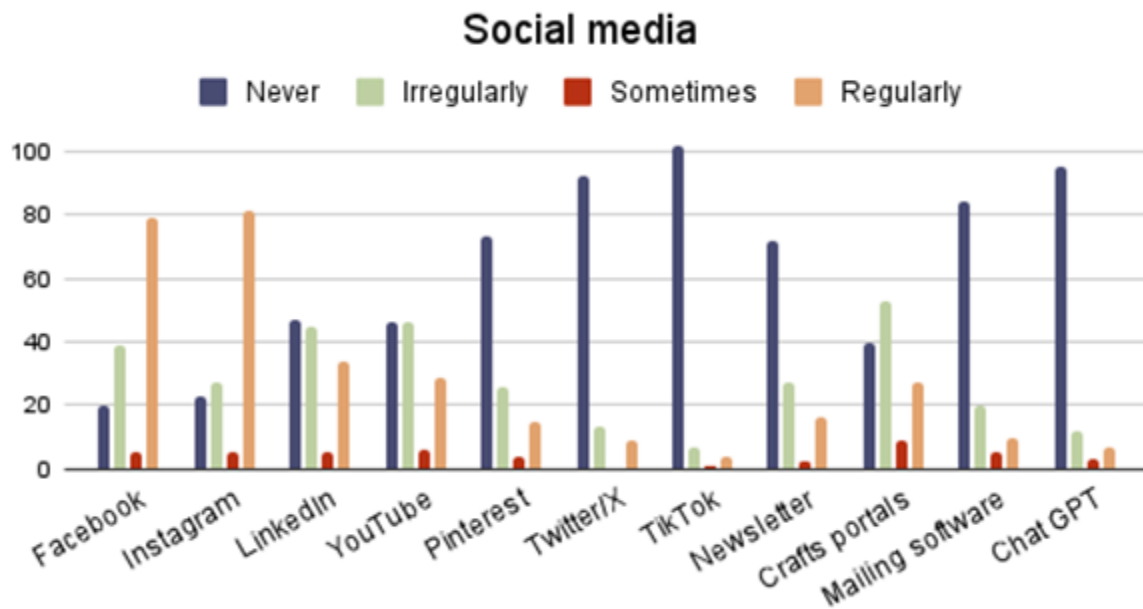


Figure 2. Mad'in Europe and Future for Religious Heritage, Survey report: Study on the situation of craft professions involved in safeguarding-built heritage (2024), p.32.

“The Study reveals that out of the 151 craftspeople who answered the survey, 130 use social media to promote their businesses online. The most common platforms for craftspeople are Facebook and Instagram, followed by LinkedIn and YouTube. Other platforms, such as Twitter, Pinterest, and TikTok, are used by a minority of craftspeople. Less than half of the respondents use craft-dedicated portals. Finally, the latest digital tools, such as virtual reality and Chat GPT, are regularly used by only 7 craftspeople” [18].

The survey findings reaffirmed our decision to rethink the forum's role within the crafts ecosystem. As a result, the virtual space is no longer positioned as a primary platform for craft professionals, but rather as a more inclusive, multi-stakeholder space aimed at fostering collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange across the entire crafts ecosystem. The redesign now better serves a broader audience, including educators, researchers, policymakers, and enthusiasts, while still providing valuable resources for craft professionals within a more diverse, cross-disciplinary context.

3.2 Restructuring

The decision to restructure and redesign the Craeft Communities forum was driven by several critical factors.

3.2.1 Widening topics

The initial material-based categorisation provided a straightforward way to organise content but limited the platform's ability to address broader and cross-cutting topics relevant to the crafts ecosystem. While this approach effectively grouped discussions by material type, it inadvertently restricted interdisciplinary conversations and knowledge exchange. By shifting to a thematic approach, the forum now accommodates a wider range of discussions, including sustainability, innovation, education, and cultural heritage. This evolution enhances the inclusivity of the platform, making it more accessible and valuable to a diverse audience, including craft practitioners, policymakers, researchers, educators, and the general public. The thematic expansion not only enriches discussions but also fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, enabling users to explore connections between different aspects of craftsmanship, tradition, and contemporary challenges.

Additionally, the new structure makes it easy to report about studies, events, projects, conferences and lectures that address one or more of the topics defined by the pillars (i.e. ELNN Summit on "Strategies for Leading Change in Education: Addressing needs and innovative approaches in education", Cultural Bees Ecosystem Forum on "Emerging Trends and Opportunities in the CCI Sector", Les Eclaireurs study (France) which "Measure the economic weight of craft companies testifying to a high-technicity know-how."...) which can feed further studies and policy recommendations.

3.2.2 Sustainability

The forum was restructured to ensure its sustainability beyond the Craeft funding period. Standalone platforms often struggle to keep users engaged after project funding ends. By integrating the Communities into the madineurope.eu portal, the forum connects with an existing network, ensuring long-term activity. By integrating the Community Forum into the madineurope.eu portal, the forum will use Mad'in Europe's connections with diverse communities to keep discussions active and visible. Through this approach, the Forum stays relevant, benefiting from ongoing interactions, content updates, and promotions. The move also opens opportunities for partnerships with the communities, strengthening the forum's long-term role.

Enhancing visibility and outreach. The redesigned forum is strategically positioned as a central hub for showcasing and disseminating not only Craeft results, but it is envisioned also as a place where results from the CRAFTOUR initiative and hence five other European projects, Colour4crafts, Hephaestus, Culturality, MOSAIC and Tracks4crafts, can share their results and initiate discussions.

This expanded role enhances the forum's visibility and amplifies its reach to a diverse range of stakeholders. By serving as a unified space for European craft-related initiatives, the forum will aim at facilitating greater collaboration and knowledge-sharing across different sectors.

A key advantage of this approach is the ability to connect various projects and initiatives, creating synergies that strengthen the craft ecosystem as a whole. The forum now provides opportunities for practitioners to share insights, researchers to present findings, and policymakers to engage in informed discussions. Moreover, by actively promoting content through digital marketing, newsletters, and social media channels, the Community attracts a wider audience and sustains engagement beyond the core user base. This visibility not only enhances the credibility of participating projects but also encourages new partnerships, funding opportunities, and cross-sectoral exchanges.

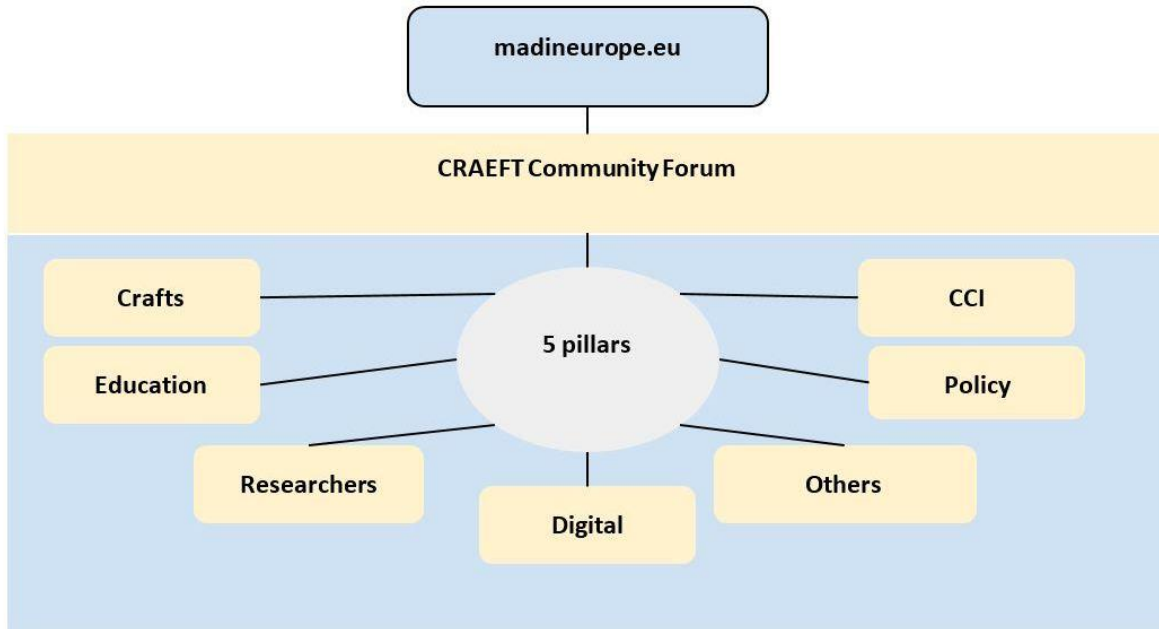


Figure 3. Community stakeholders.

Integrating “Communities” into one “Community”. A pivotal aspect of the platform's redesign was the integration of several communities into one wide "Community". This change emphasises the commitment to inclusivity and diversity, moving away from the notion of a singular, homogenous group to a more dynamic and multifaceted network. The plural form reflects the recognition that crafts encompass a wide range of disciplines, traditions, and contemporary innovations, each with its own distinct yet interconnected audience. By adopting this framework, the platform actively welcomes a broader spectrum of voices and perspectives, encouraging participation from traditional artisans, digital craft innovators, educators, researchers, and policymakers alike. This inclusive approach fosters interdisciplinary dialogue and engagement, ensuring that the platform remains a relevant and evolving space for discourse on craft-related topics. Furthermore, the shift in branding aligns with the thematic expansion, reinforcing the forum's role as a diverse and adaptable ecosystem that supports multiple conversations and initiatives within the European craft landscape.

3.3 Overview of the Pillars

Following the restructuring process, the Craeft Community was reorganised around five thematic pillars that reflect both the strategic priorities of the Craeft project and the broader structural challenges of the European crafts ecosystem. These pillars function as transversal frameworks rather than isolated categories, enabling interdisciplinary dialogue and cross-sectoral collaboration. Instead of segmenting discussions by material or profession, the thematic organisation encourages participants to engage with systemic questions related to value, authenticity, transmission, economic sustainability, and documentation. The following subsections present each pillar and its relevance to the safeguarding and revitalisation of crafts.

1. Understanding & Valorisation: Understanding crafts and highlighting the values they embed as an asset for heritage preservation, sustainability, social cohesion, economic development... The

process includes understanding the dexterity of gesture through, developing self-valorisation of craftspeople themselves, and sharing values with the public.

2. **Authenticity & Safeguard:** Definition of crafts at the EU level. Recognising and valuing authentic products over imitations, safeguarding genuine artisanal craftsmanship and territorial heritage diversity. Mapping crafts (techniques + materials + use + design) that have territorial roots and are part of heritage. This can also be implemented and help the further development of Geographical indications for craft and industrial products.
3. **Transmission & Training:** Mapping, analysing, testing, and promoting new formal and non-formal educational paths and formats, including hands-on experiences, digital learning, VR, augmented reality, and hybrid formats. Map of endangered skills and transmission opportunities / best practices. Certification models.
4. **Economics and Innovative and Sustainable Business Models:** Attracting the next generations into the crafts sector is a condition for the safeguarding of crafts and European diversity. Empowering small crafts businesses' attractiveness relies on the capacity of crafts businesses to generate sufficient revenues for future generations. New business models are necessary to face globalisation, which integrate innovation in the design/making/marketing process / (new income perspectives, tutoring...).
5. **Documentation & Archiving:** Despite efforts to safeguard and transmit crafts to future generations there is a certainty that some crafts might be lost, in practice, forever. Many indications and constant research findings are confirming this, among which are the alarming Red List of Endangered Heritage Crafts in the UK developed by the Heritage Crafts Association and since this year the German Manufactory Route (Deutsche Manufakturen Strasse) list in Germany. Therefore, thinking about documenting and archiving craft techniques, gestures and tools is of crucial importance. In addition, these innovative and advanced contributions to crafts documentation can also be of significance to UNESCO and the way crafts as part of intangible cultural heritage are documented currently.

The five core forum pillars, Understanding & Valorisation, Authenticity & Safeguard, Transmission & Training, Economics & Innovative and Sustainable Business Models, and Documentation & Archiving, aim to comprehensively address the key challenges and opportunities within the crafts sector. These themes reflect the sector's pressing needs, from preserving heritage and ensuring authenticity to fostering education, economic sustainability, and long-term documentation. By structuring discussions around these interconnected areas, the forum provides a platform where craft practitioners, policymakers, educators, and researchers can collaborate, exchange knowledge, and develop strategies that support the sector's evolution. Ultimately, these topics contribute to a holistic approach to strengthening crafts as a vital part of cultural heritage, economic growth, and social cohesion in Europe and beyond. Additionally, the forum allows cross-topic posts, enabling discussions that bridge multiple themes. This flexibility encourages interdisciplinary exchanges and highlights the interconnections between different aspects of craftsmanship, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of challenges and solutions within the sector.

3.4 Tools and Technologies

The conceptual restructuring of the Craeft Community required a corresponding technical implementation capable of supporting interaction, moderation, and knowledge exchange in a user-friendly environment. The technological design of the platform was therefore guided by three principles: accessibility, transparency, and support for community-driven interaction. This subsection presents the

technical architecture of the forum, including its wireframe, navigation structure, user experience design, and governance mechanisms.

3.4.1 Wireframe

The wireframe represents a structured online community forum designed to facilitate interaction and knowledge-sharing among craft professionals, educators, researchers, and enthusiasts. The platform is built around five thematic pillars, each focusing on a key aspect of crafts, including preservation, training, business models, and documentation.

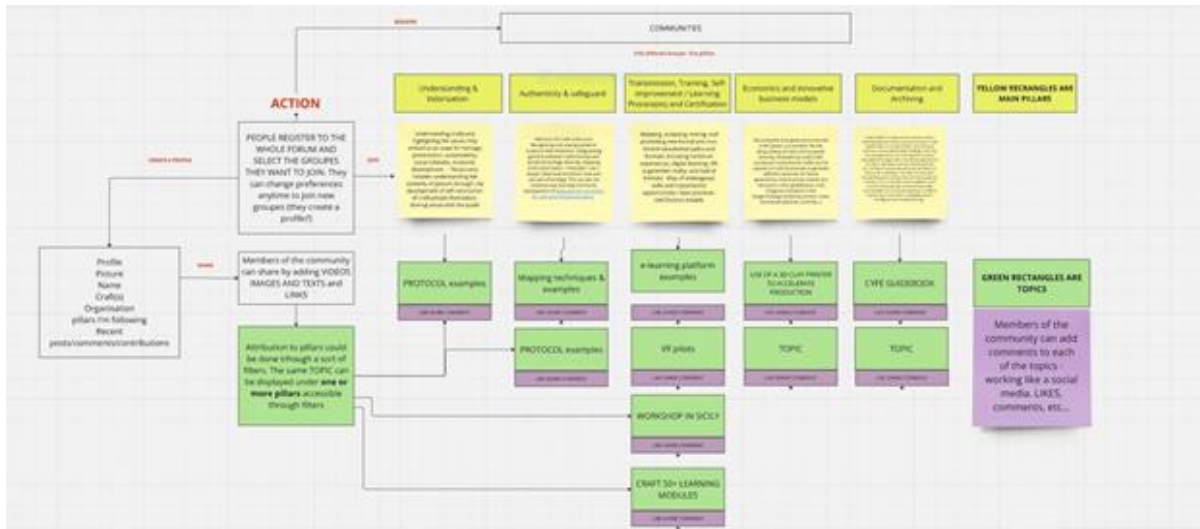


Figure 4. Communities’ wireframe.

To join the community, users must first register. Once registered, they gain access to all five thematic pillars/groups of the forum. Registration enables users to create posts and engage with discussions by commenting. All posts and comments are publicly visible, along with the user’s profile, ensuring transparency and open interaction.

The platform is structured around five main pillars, highlighted in yellow on the wireframe:

1. Understanding & Valorisation
2. Authenticity & Safeguarding
3. Transmission, Training, Self-improvement & Certification
4. Economics & Innovative Business Models
5. Documentation & Archiving

Within these pillars, community members of the communities can share various types of content, including videos, images, text, and links. Examples of topics, represented by green rectangles, serve as focal points for discussion and knowledge exchange. Each topic can be associated with one or multiple pillars and is accessible through a filtering system. Members can interact with other members through messages, and topics by sharing, and commenting, making the platform function similarly to a social media network.



Some of the key discussion topics include protocol examples, mapping techniques, and digital tools such as e-learning platforms and virtual reality applications. The platform also explores advanced technologies like 3D clay printing and workshops and learning modules that provide hands-on training for craft practitioners.

Overall, this platform offers a dynamic and interactive space to exchange knowledge, document practices, and engage in discussions that contribute to the safeguarding and revitalisation of crafts, for innovation, and transmission of skills. Its structured pillars and community-driven approach foster a collaborative ecosystem where users can contribute to and benefit from collective expertise.

3.4.2 Pages and Navigation

Following the wireframe, the menu was designed to reflect the platform's core structure and key ideas:

- Home
- Each of the pillars/discussion groups page:
 - Understanding & Valorisation
 - Authenticity & Safeguarding
 - Transmission, Training, Self-improvement & Certification
 - Economics & Innovative Business Models
 - Documentation & Archiving
- Registration page for users (full profile form) to join the community
- Members
- Logout
- User Profile

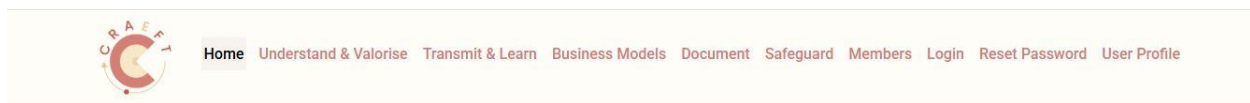


Figure 5. Communities' menu.

The homepage serves as the welcoming gateway to the forum, featuring an introductory text that outlines the platform's purpose and mission. It provides an overview of all five thematic pillars, each representing a distinct area of focus within the craft communities. Each thematic pillar is accompanied by a visible introductory text, clearly explaining its main objectives and the types of discussions users can expect to find within that section. This layout ensures that users can easily navigate and gain a quick understanding of the topics and themes that interest them most.

Join the CRAEFT Communities



Credit: Madina Benvenuti, MadIn Europe (2024). Collage featuring Limoges porcelain, marble carving from Tinos, filigree technique from Ioannina, wood carving from Yedigöller, and glasswork from CERFAV Glass School.

Submit your own papers to the community

Our community platform is designed for all stakeholders in the crafts sector—from craft professionals and associations to researchers, policymakers, educators, economists, consumers, and young people. We invite everyone who believes that crafts can build a better future to share their experiences, best practices, and recommendations. Your insights will help us build a comprehensive picture of the obstacles confronting the crafts sector and guide innovative solutions for its revitalization. Join us in shaping an environment where authenticity is

Figure 6. Communities home page.

Each page dedicated to specific pillars/discussion topics begins with a general introduction to the subject, inviting people to join the conversation. Below this introductory text, one finds all the posts or topics listed under the respective theme. Each post is represented by a large visual, a prominent title, and a brief text designed to spark interest. Additionally, the content poster (or the person responsible for the post) is visible, maintaining transparency and showing who initiated the discussion. Each post also includes engagement information, such as the number of comments and the date it was posted. A green “Read More” button encourages further exploration of the content.

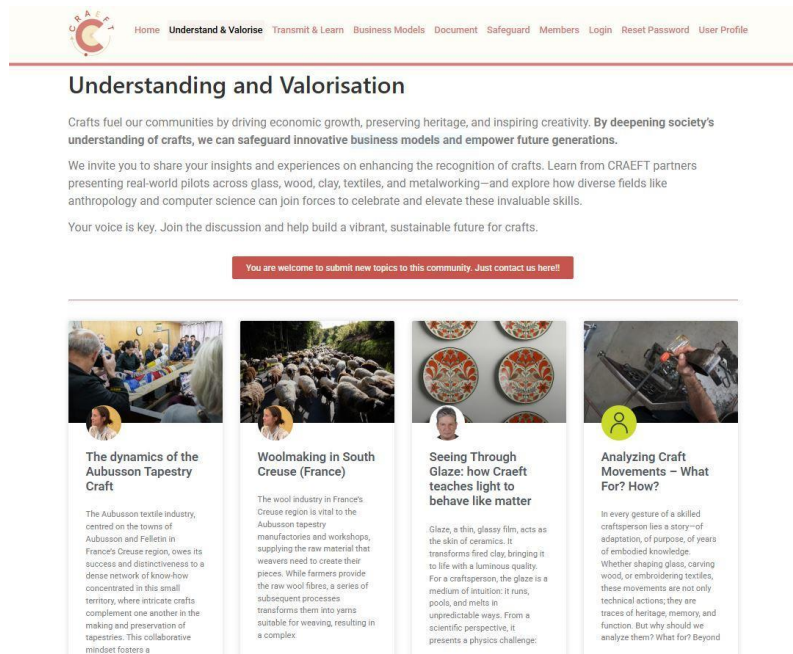


Figure 7. Communities Understanding and Valorisation page.

This system is used to build each discussion page. Always showing the newest posts at the top. By simply clicking on the post, the user enters the specific post and hence can engage in the discussion.



Figure 8. Communities: example of one post page layout.

The post page is divided in half, creating a user-friendly layout that makes it easy to follow both the text and visuals of the post. On the right-hand side, users can easily view and engage with comments, fostering an interactive experience. This split layout ensures that the content remains visually appealing while allowing for seamless navigation.

Additionally, the page includes a comment box at the bottom, providing a simple and accessible way for users to leave their thoughts and contribute to the discussion. This encourages active participation and creates an engaging space for dialogue. The intuitive design helps maintain the flow of conversation while keeping the focus on the content and user interaction.

The post page and all post/discussion topics are visible to both members(users) and non-members, but the ability to comment and participate in the discussion is only available to users and registered individuals.

The user page is inspired by the layout of social media platforms, providing a familiar and user-friendly interface. It is designed to present information about a single user, including their name and last name, profile picture, and a cover image to add a personal touch. In addition to the basic details, the page also displays notifications, comments made by the user, and their overall activity on the platform, including all

the posts made by this user. This allows visitors to quickly get an overview of the user’s engagement. Furthermore, the page features a direct messaging option, enabling users to communicate easily and fostering interaction within the communities.

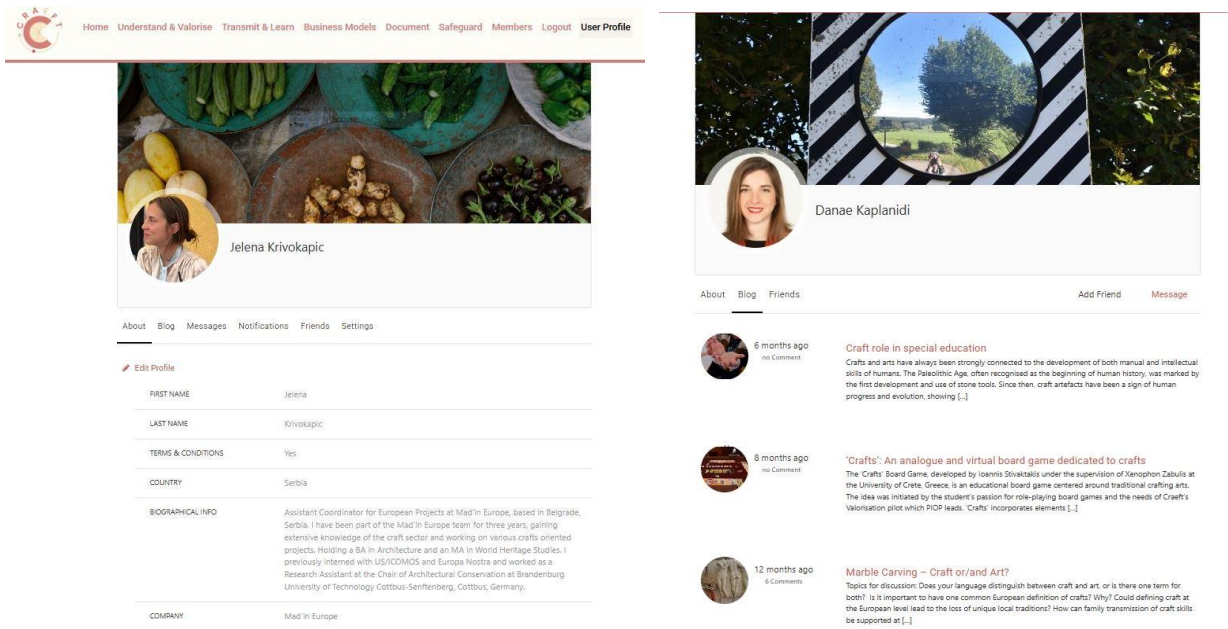


Figure 9. Left: User page example. Right: Blog posts by the user.

In addition to the individual user page (user profile), a dedicated page has been developed for all Craeft Community users, displaying the full network of members. This page enables users to browse through profiles, discover peers with shared interests or complementary skills, and initiate connections that can lead to meaningful exchanges and collaborations. By offering a clear and transparent overview of the community, it fosters visibility, accessibility, and a stronger sense of belonging to the Community.

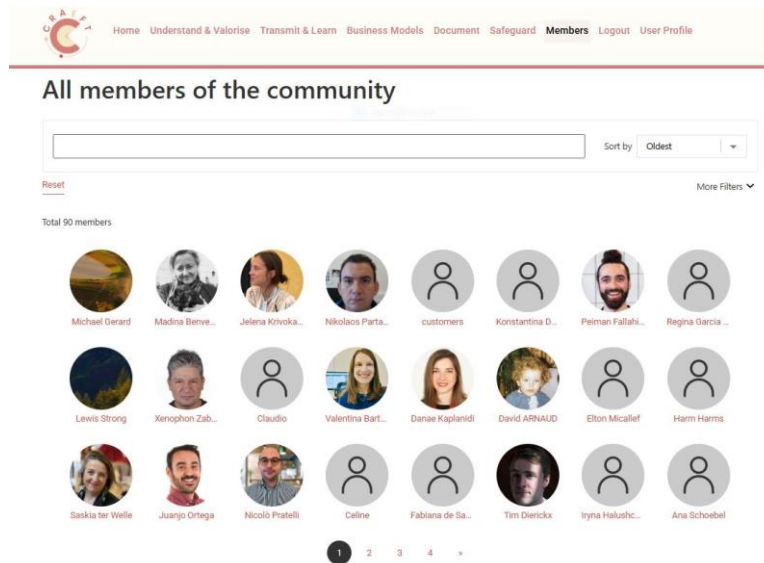


Figure 10. All Community Members page.

3.4.3 User Experience

The platform is designed for seamless communication and engagement, featuring an intuitive, social media-inspired interface that makes it easy to navigate, share content, and participate in discussions. With familiarly designed elements, users can quickly interact with posts, join conversations, and exchange knowledge effortlessly.

The Community's forum is structured around thematic groups, allowing users to engage in focused discussions, follow relevant topics, and contribute through posts and comments. This setup fosters an open, interactive space where both experienced professionals and newcomers can easily connect, exchange insights, and collaborate.

To encourage meaningful discussions, the platform supports various content formats, including text posts, images, videos, and links to external resources. Users can comment on posts, ask questions, and share best practices, ensuring a fluid exchange of ideas. Content is organised into thematic pillars but can also be filtered across multiple areas, helping discussions reach the right audience.

The platform accommodates different levels of engagement, ensuring inclusivity for all users. Observers can browse discussions and stay informed, contributors can share insights, resources, and experiences, while discussion participants can actively engage in structured conversations. Private messages can be sent by users to each other.

With its intuitive design and flexible interaction options, the platform provides an open and dynamic space for the members of different communities to establish connections and opens the possibility for new collaborations.

3.4.4 Joining Community



To join the Craeft Community, users must first register on the platform, providing essential information such as their name and last name, email address, and a chosen password. This process ensures that only legitimate users can access the communities and participate in discussions. The registration process is designed to be simple, requiring only the minimum necessary data to create an account. However, users may choose to add more detailed information to their profiles, such as their organisation, areas of expertise, and crafts they specialise in.

Upon registration, users will receive an email confirming their account, and they will be prompted to set up their profile. This process encourages users to engage with the communities, but also provides them with control over the data they wish to share.

After registering, members have full access to the Craeft Community, meaning they can join discussions by commenting, replying to specific public comments, contacting other members through direct messages, and posting their own topics.

3.4.5 Privacy and Security

The privacy and security of users on the platform are of great importance. As a space where craft professionals, educators, researchers, IT players, and enthusiasts come together to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences, the forum must ensure that personal data is protected and that all interactions are safe and respectful. This section outlines the platform's approach to user privacy, data security, and the measures in place to maintain safe and transparent online communities.

Once registered, users have access to all five thematic pillars/groups of the forum. Each pillar focuses on a specific area of discussion, allowing members to engage with topics related to preservation, training, business models, documentation, and more. However, privacy is maintained throughout the process. The platform ensures that any personal information shared during registration is securely stored and will not be used for any purpose other than creating and managing user accounts.

Users' profile information (such as name, profile picture and cover photo) is visible to other members of the communities, while sensitive personal data, such as email and passwords, is kept private and not shared with other users.

The platform follows strict privacy policies to ensure that users' information is handled in compliance with applicable data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Directive (ePrivacy). These measures guarantee that personal data is not misused, shared without consent, or exposed to unnecessary risks.

In addition to protecting personal information and moderating user interactions, the platform employs a variety of security measures to safeguard users' data and ensure that all activities within the forum are secure. All data shared during registration, profile creation, and forum interactions is encrypted using secure protocols, preventing unauthorised access and potential breaches.

To further enhance security, the platform regularly updates its security protocols, ensuring that any vulnerabilities are identified and addressed promptly. This includes applying security patches, performing regular audits, and maintaining a high level of protection against cyber threats, including hacking attempts, data breaches, and phishing attacks.



In addition to these technical safeguards, users are encouraged to use strong passwords and to regularly update their login credentials.

3.4.6 Access, Roles, and Governance

While the privacy and security of personal data are crucial, the platform also focuses on protecting the integrity of interactions within the forum to ensure it functions as a true virtual space for a Community of Practice (CoP). Once a user has registered, they move from being a simple observer to a participant with the ability to post content and engage in discussions across the five thematic pillars. However, to ensure the platform remains a respectful, safe, and high-quality space, all posts must undergo a moderation process before being made public. This process is not merely a technical filter to prevent spam or harmful content, but a form of intentional cultivation designed to ensure that members receive high value for their time.

The platform operates with multiple user roles, reflecting the diverse levels of engagement found in CoPs, from passive members who browse discussions to core members who actively contribute insights. While basic users can view and comment on posts, the governance of the community is led by Technology Stewards (moderators and administrators from MDE and FORTH). These stewards are individuals with enough experience in the crafts community to understand its technological needs and enough expertise to lead the selection, configuration, and support of the digital tools used in practice.

The responsibilities of these Technology Stewards include:

- Content alignment: Reviewing new posts to ensure they follow community guidelines and align with the platform's purpose of safeguarding and revitalising European crafts.
- Facilitating interaction: Managing the approval of posts to create a controlled environment where discussions focus on valuable, relevant content.
- Supporting practice: Identifying and spreading good practices among members and supporting community experimentation with new digital formats like VR, AI or the Craeft Protocol.
- Maintaining safety: Flagging inappropriate material and acting as the responsible party for Notice and Action mechanisms.

Additionally, the ability to comment on posts encourages centripetal movement, where newcomers learn to speak the language of the community and eventually move toward full participation. While comments do not require pre-approval to encourage fluid dialogue, they remain subject to stewardship; moderators may remove content that does not contribute positively to the learning process. By allowing users to report suspicious activity, the platform encourages all members to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge and safety of the community.

Transparency is a core value of the platform, ensuring that the community operates on a foundation of trust. Users have clear visibility into how their data is collected, used, and stored, with the platform providing a detailed privacy policy that allows members to make informed decisions about their participation. Furthermore, users are empowered with control over their personal information, including the ability to delete or deactivate their accounts at any time.

To maintain this trust, the following protocols are implemented:



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



Regular communication: Users receive notifications regarding any changes to privacy policies, terms of use, or security protocols, ensuring they remain informed about data handling steps.

Accountability: The platform is committed to a secure environment where users can interact freely; it combines user-friendly privacy controls with robust security measures and content moderation to ensure all interactions remain secure.

Collective responsibility: By allowing users to report suspicious activity or content that violates guidelines, the platform encourages all members to participate in maintaining the community's safety.

This balanced approach of expert stewardship and user empowerment guarantees that the Craeft Community remains a safe and valuable space for craft professionals, educators, and enthusiasts to collaborate and grow.

In summary, the methodology underpinning the Craeft Community combines theoretical grounding in Communities of Practice with iterative digital design and stakeholder-informed restructuring. By moving from a material-based segmentation toward a thematic, multi-stakeholder architecture supported by structured governance and technological stewardship, the platform operationalises the concept of a Virtual Community of Practice concretely and sustainably. The resulting structure reflects both the social nature of learning in crafts and the practical realities of digital engagement within contemporary European professional ecosystems.

4 Engagement

One of the key elements of VCoPs is their ability to generate engagement and attract community members. In other words, to create enough excitement, relevance, and value to sustain participation. As highlighted by Wenger et al. (2002), while factors such as institutional support or urgent shared challenges can help establish a Community of Practice, a clear and meaningful purpose is essential for its continuity and long-term vitality.

In this context, the Craeft project has prioritised engagement as a strategic objective and has implemented two complementary approaches:

1. **Developing attractive, relevant, and timely content.** Craeft has focused on curating and producing fresh, meaningful topics that resonate with diverse stakeholders in the craft sector that the Community aims to attract. By addressing current issues, highlighting innovative practices, interdisciplinary dialogues on crafts, and encouraging knowledge exchange, the project stimulates interest and motivates members to actively participate in discussions and activities. Moreover, the content strategy actively encourages participation rather than passive consumption. Through thought-provoking questions, showcasing community contributions, and inviting feedback, the project stimulates peer-to-peer exchange, reinforcing a sense of ownership and belonging among members. This approach transforms content into a catalyst for interaction, rather than just information delivery.
2. **Establishing a robust communication and dissemination strategy.** A strong emphasis has been placed on multi-channel communication, ensuring visibility and accessibility of content. Through coordinated communication across social media, newsletters, events, and partner networks, Craeft aimed to attract initial users, expand its reach, and gradually build a committed community. A key aspect of this strategy has been the use of progressive and engaging communication techniques, such as “teasing” content. By sharing fragments of insights, previewing upcoming topics, or resharing comments and contributions from community members, Craeft creates anticipation and curiosity, encouraging users to return, engage, and contribute.



Figure 11. Diagram showing the engagement efforts.

The visual presents the engagement effort structured as a circular diagram. At the centre is the word “engagement”, defined as the goal to boost community participation. Surrounding it are multiple actions and strategies that contribute to achieving this goal.

On the left side, the focus is on content creation and identity, including:

- Designing engaging, stand-out content
- Building a distinctive and coherent visual identity
- Bridging topics and aligning themes
- Joining efforts and spreading within the CRAFTOUR² community

On the right side, the emphasis shifts to communication and outreach, such as:

- engaging partners and networks
- sharing within wider European networks
- promotion across multiple channels (newsletters, social media, websites, conferences, networking)

Across the diagram, smaller supporting actions are highlighted: resharing, tagging, linking individuals, promoting relevant (“hot”) topics, encouraging discussion, and using visual storytelling. As a key message,

² CRAFTOUR is a European initiative bringing together 75 partners and six major projects (CRAFFT, Hephestus, Track4Crafts, Colour4Crafts, MOSAIC and Culturality) to safeguard, support, and modernise traditional craftsmanship through innovation, research, and community engagement. More about the CRAFTOUR: <https://projects.madineurope.eu/craftour/>



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



the diagram illustrates that engagement is not a single action, but the result of coordinated, multi-layered efforts.

Overall, these approaches demonstrate that building a community is a gradual process: from attracting initial attention, to fostering interaction, and ultimately to developing long-term commitment and active participation.

5 Results

This chapter presents the findings from the Craeft Community Pilot, structured to provide a comprehensive overview of the platform's performance as an emerging Virtual Community of Practice. The evaluation of the pilot is divided into two primary dimensions: a quantitative assessment of user behaviour and a qualitative analysis of the thematic discourse.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that while the Craeft Community is still in an early growth phase, it has successfully established the foundations of an active Virtual Community of Practice. The engagement patterns indicate a particular demand for structured discussions around Transmission & Training, confirming that skill preservation remains a central concern within the sector.

5.1 Quantitative Results

The Craeft Community Pilot successfully reached a membership of 86 registered individuals during the initial phase. Engagement metrics indicate 31 primary posts and 27 interactions, with an average of 12 daily users maintaining a session duration of 57 seconds. Among the five thematic pillars, the "Transmission & Training" page emerged as the most visited section, reflecting the sector's urgent priority for skill preservation.

The list of all posts can be found in Annex A.

5.2 Qualitative Results

The topics shared on the Craeft Community generated meaningful and high-quality discussions, even though the overall number of contributions was lower than initially expected. Despite this, several discussions demonstrated strong engagement, raised critical questions, and contributed valuable insights.

One recurring theme was the relevance of GIs for craft and industrial products. The exchange on the Craeft Community revealed a degree of scepticism among practitioners, particularly regarding their real-world applicability. Some instructors observed that "consumers mostly look at price, not geographic origin," while others expressed concern that the administrative burden associated with GIs could reduce time available for actual production. This highlights an underlying tension between regulatory frameworks and everyday craft practice. Importantly, these discussions demonstrate that the platform functions not only as a dissemination tool but also as a space where structural challenges and differing professional perspectives become visible and open to debate, which could be used as a great insight for policymakers.

Another prominent discussion explored the blurred boundary between art and craft, particularly in the context of marble carving. Reflections shared by practitioners emphasised how tradition and creativity are deeply intertwined, challenging the perceived division between manual work and intellectual creation. Historical and linguistic perspectives reinforced this point: in many cultures, including Ancient Greek (*téchne*), Latin (*ars*), and other linguistic traditions, art and craft were not separated but understood as unified forms of skilled, creative expression. This discussion also revisited the ideas of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, which advocated for the integration of aesthetic and functional values. While contemporary perceptions often position art as intellectual and craft as manual, contributors



D6.4 Community, methodology and results



argued that craft equally embodies creativity, expertise, and innovation. Historical references further illustrate that this division emerged relatively late, particularly during the Renaissance, when aesthetic appreciation began to outweigh functional value. These reflections highlight that the question of whether artists or craftspeople are more valued today remains closely tied to broader economic and market structures.

Discussions also engaged with the recognition of crafts as intangible cultural heritage, particularly in relation to UNESCO inscriptions such as Turkish *Çini* and Alençon lace-making. These exchanges raised important questions about how heritage crafts evolve within institutional frameworks. Participants reflected on the challenge of balancing respect for traditional methods with the freedom to innovate, a tension that is widely experienced across craft disciplines.

The transition from traditional master–apprentice systems to formalised education in vocational schools and public institutions was another key point of debate. Contributors questioned how tacit knowledge, such as sensitivity to materials and embodied skills, can be preserved outside of workshop-based learning environments. Concerns were also raised about the potential emergence of parallel systems, one academic and institutional, and the other rooted in traditional artisanal practice.

A broader critical perspective emerged regarding the visibility of intangible versus tangible heritage. While UNESCO recognition of monuments and sites often attracts tourism, media attention, and investment, intangible heritage, such as craft practices, remains more vulnerable. Unlike physical sites, intangible heritage cannot be passively consumed; it must be actively experienced, transmitted, and supported through education and community engagement. As a result, its preservation depends less on recognition alone and more on sustained policies and active participation. Finally, contributors proposed rethinking the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage by moving beyond their separation. Instead, they suggested a more integrated approach in which buildings, landscapes, and physical artefacts are interpreted alongside the skills, materials, and practices that created them. This perspective aligns with broader concepts such as cultural landscapes, where people, nature, and culture are understood as interconnected. Such an approach could enhance both the visibility and impact of craft heritage by embedding it within a more holistic narrative.

Overall, the qualitative findings demonstrate that the Craeft Community fosters critical reflection, knowledge exchange, and dialogue on key challenges facing the craft sector. Even though the engagement rate was lower than expected, the platform has proven its capacity to host complex issues related to policy, education, practice, and perception, reinforcing its role as an emerging Virtual Community of Practice.

According to the existing discussions, we think that the Craeft Community demonstrates strong potential as a bottom-up tool for collecting opinions, identifying strengths, and mapping key challenges within the craft sector across Europe. The platform enables practitioners, educators, researchers and a diverse variety of stakeholders to articulate their experiences and concerns directly, creating a valuable pool of grounded, practice-based knowledge. As such, it can serve not only as a space for exchange but also as an evidence-gathering mechanism to inform future policy development, support frameworks, and strategic actions aimed at strengthening the craft ecosystem.

6 Conclusion

The results confirm that the pilot largely succeeded in its objective to create a multi-stakeholder space that facilitates cross-disciplinary dialogue. By transitioning from "material silos" to thematic pillars, the forum addressed the limitations of the initial structure, allowing topics like sustainability and innovation to be discussed transversally. The high engagement in training topics validates the theoretical importance of the "learning curriculum", where the community functions as a living curriculum for both experts and newcomers. The tools succeeded in providing a safe, transparent virtual workspace governed by Technology Stewards who ensure content quality and member alignment.

6.1 Significance

The significance of this pilot lies in its three-fold contribution to the craft ecosystem:

Preservation of cultural heritage: The Craeft Community is an important player in positioning crafts as an integral part of cultural heritage. It connects crafts to a broader heritage perspective, highlighting them as a key resource for sustaining our built heritage, providing the essential skills needed for the conservation, maintenance, and restoration of historic houses, churches, bridges, and other structures. At the same time, crafts are crucial for the care of movable heritage, supplying the expertise required for the maintenance, conservation, and restoration of objects such as books, furniture, and other artefacts. The Community advocates for a holistic understanding of heritage, recognising the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible elements and the central role of craft skills in preserving both.

Economic sustainability: The forum initiates a collective voice on Geographical indications for craft and industrial products and new business models, addressing the tension between traditional craftsmanship and the globalised, price-driven market.

Bridging the gap between manual and digital: The inclusion of IT and AI players alongside artisans fosters a new type of practitioner identity, bridging the divide between "manual labour" and "digital innovation". As well as the ongoing debate of innovation in crafts. What it is and to which line craft professional can innovate and apply digital tools, but still stay true to the traditions of their craft.

The inclusion of IT and AI stakeholders alongside artisans fosters a new hybrid practitioner identity. This interdisciplinary interaction challenges the traditional divide between "manual labour" and "digital innovation," demonstrating that technological tools can serve as enablers rather than replacements of craft knowledge. In this sense, the forum supports the emergence of new professional profiles at the intersection of heritage, design, and digital technologies.

Unlike existing craft-specific forums such as *The Engraver's Cafe* or *Ravelry*, which provide niche expertise in singular crafts, Craeft advances the field by creating an interdisciplinary ecosystem. Most state-of-the-art platforms act as "new manuals" for patterns and designs; however, the Craeft Community Pilot functions as a "Virtual Community of Practice" that includes policymakers and researchers to solve systemic sector challenges. This approach moves beyond simple knowledge sharing to knowledge stewardship.



More broadly, the pilot demonstrates that digital infrastructures can meaningfully support apprenticeship-based sectors without replacing their social foundations. In line with Lave and Wenger's theory [12], the Craeft Community operationalises the concept of learning as participation in practice. It provides a structured yet flexible environment where newcomers can move from peripheral observation to active contribution. In doing so, the pilot challenges the marginalisation of apprenticeship within dominant educational paradigms and repositions craft learning as a contemporary and socially embedded mode of knowledge production.

6.2 Limitations and Future Work

A primary limitation of this pilot lies in the relatively small user base and the early stage of platform adoption. While 86 registered members represent a promising initial community, broader participation is necessary to fully evaluate long-term engagement patterns and knowledge circulation dynamics. Furthermore, the "Effort vs. Engagement Gap" identified in existing research remains visible: many practitioners continue to prioritise established social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook for business visibility, even though these platforms often lack the depth, transparency, and structured knowledge exchange that a dedicated forum can provide. Additionally, the platform's exclusive use of English may limit participation among European artisans who are more comfortable communicating in their native languages. Multilingual functionality could significantly enhance inclusivity and foster deeper engagement across different cultural contexts.

As voluntary communities, VCoPs can only survive and be relevant if they can generate enough excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members, according to Wenger et al (2002). Other factors, such as management support or an urgent problem, can develop a sustainable CoP, but purpose is essential if they are to continue and thrive [2].

It is important to highlight that, according to Lave and Wenger, apprenticeship has been marginalised in educational theory despite its historical role in producing skilled practitioners, as dominant functionalist and Marxist perspectives tend to frame it as a relic of the past, an outdated learning form, rather than a meaningful mode of knowledge production [12].

Future research should further investigate how digital Communities of Practice can be embedded within broader "cultural landscapes" that integrate people, nature, craftsmanship, and place-based identity. Moreover, exploring how training systems and apprenticeship models can be formally connected to emerging Geographical Indication frameworks could open new pathways for aligning cultural preservation with economic resilience. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in assessing whether thematic digital forums can generate sustained participation and measurable impact beyond project funding cycles.

Ultimately, the Craeft Community Pilot illustrates that the traditional guild model can be meaningfully reinterpreted in the digital age: not as a closed structure of exclusive expertise, but as an open, interdisciplinary, and stewarded Virtual Community of Practice capable of safeguarding Europe's craft heritage while enabling its future evolution.

Annex A

The following table lists all posts created during the project duration. It should be noted that the Craeft Community was launched on 14 March 2025 and that the VCoP has been active for less than one year. In addition, the table indicates the number of interactions (comments) for each post.

#	Title	Topic	Link
1.	The dynamics of the Aubusson Tapestry Craft	Ecosystem of the Aubusson Tapestry creation	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/the-dynamics-of-the-aubusson-tapestry-craft/
2.	Marble Carving: Craft or/and Art?	Differences between arts and crafts. Understanding crafts.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/marble-carving-craft-or-and-art/
3.	Woolmaking in South Creuse (France)	Wool production, local resources, crafts and relationship with the landscape/territory	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/woolmaking-in-south-creuse-france/
4.	“Les Eclaireurs”, a French Study that Measures the Economic Weight of Companies in the Arts and Crafts	Economic impact of crafts. Crafts as a business, as economic activities.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/les-eclaireurs-a-french-study-that-measures-the-economic-weight-of-companies-in-the-arts-and-crafts/
5.	Silver Threads of Time: Safeguarding the Silversmithing Tradition of Epirus	Roles of institutions in safeguarding and transmitting crafts.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/silver-threads-of-time-safeguarding-the-silversmithing-tradition-of-epirus/
6.	“A Living Craft in Stone Walls: The Silversmithing Museum of Ioannina”	Crafts in a Museum?	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/a-living-craft-in-stone-walls-the-silversmithing-museum-of-ioannina/
7.	Seeing Through Glaze: how Craeft teaches light to behave like matter	Rendering tool for glaze	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/seeing-through-glaze-how-craeft-teaches-light-to-behave-like-matter/
8.	Traditional Wall-Carpet Craftsmanship in Romania and the	UNESCO recognised craft as part of the ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/traditional-wall-carpet-craftsmanship-in-romania-and-the-republic-of-moldova/

Republic of Moldova			
9.	Future of Copper Craftsmanship of Lahij: Preservation, Promotion, Transmission	UNESCO recognised craft as part of the ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/future-of-copper-craftsmanship-of-lahij-preservation-promotion-transmission/
10.	Launching the Protocol: Digitising Artisanal Gestures at Cerfav	Craeft Ethnographic Protocol. Digitising ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/understanding-gestures-of-practitioners-in-glass-crafts-pilot-in-cerfav/
11.	Analysing Craft Movements: What For? How?	Craeft Ethnographic Protocol	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/analyzing-craft-movements-what-for-how/
12.	Model of Skills Transmission of Traditional Violin Craftsmanship in Cremona, Italy	Models of skills transmission through example.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/model-of-skills-transmission-of-traditional-violin-craftsmanship-in-cremona-italy/
13.	Woodcarving education in Spain: a look at formal and informal training opportunities	Models of skills transmission through example.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/woodcarving-education-in-spain-a-look-at-formal-and-informal-training-opportunities/
14.	Methodology Experiment Training	Hybrid learning as a solution for craft transmission.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/methodology-experiment-training/
15.	Expanding the Testing and Implementation of the Craeft Ethnographic Protocol: A Focus on Silversmithing	Craeft Ethnographic Protocol through the example of Ioannina silversmithing.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/expanding-the-testing-and-implementation-of-the-craeft-ethnographic-protocol-a-focus-on-silversmithing/
16.	Sustainable and Accessible Glassblowing Through Virtual Reality	Application of VR in crafts. VR as a tool for transmission and training in crafts.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/sustainable-and-accessible-glassblowing-through-virtual-reality/
17.	UNESCO Nomination Process for Straw Weaving in Belarus	UNESCO recognised craft as part of the ICH. Community transmission and	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/unesco-nomination-process-for-straw-weaving-in-belarus/

		institutional support as safeguarding mechanisms.	
18	Lesvos' identity in the hands of a potter	How crafts shape the identity of the place. Interconnection of crafts and territory.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/lesvos-identity-in-the-hands-of-a-potter/
19	Craft role in special education	Special education and crafts: example.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/craft-role-in-special-education/
20	Harnessing Interoperability and Standardised Data in the Craft Domain: A Semantic Web Perspective	Connection between semantic web technologies and Linked Open Data with ICH, particularly crafts. Digitising heritage: ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/harnessing-interoperability-and-standardised-data-in-the-craft-domain-a-semantic-web-perspective/
21	An Exhibition to Promote the Art of Woodcarving	Art formats for crafts promotion. Use of exhibitions as channels to promote crafts.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/an-exhibition-to-promote-the-art-of-woodcarving/
22	Empowering Craft Professionals: Fostering Innovation and Reducing Constraints	Innovating business models for traditional European crafts.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/empowering-craft-professionals-fostering-innovation-and-reducing-constraints/
23	Experimenting with New Digital Tools to Empower Learning of Glass Crafts	New pathways for crafts transmission: VR and Moodle.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/experimenting-with-new-digital-tools-to-empower-learning-of-glass-crafts/
24	Transmission of Craftsmanship: A New Perspective?	New pathways for crafts transmission - Gaussian Splatting.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/3d-technologies-and-the-transmission-of-craftsmanship/
25	Alençon Needle Lace-Making	UNESCO recognised craft as part of the ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/alencon-needle-lace-making/
26	Les voix du verre: Craeft x CERFAV: O1 La motivation	Podcast as a communication channel on crafts. Can something visual, a craft, be communicated only through sound? Words?	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/les-voix-du-verre-craeft-x-cerfav-o1-la-motivation/

27	'Crafts': An analogue and virtual board game dedicated to crafts	Game on as a communication and awareness-raising tool.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/crafts-an-analogue-and-virtual-board-game-dedicated-to-crafts/
28	Empowering Craft Heritage: New Geographic Indicators for Crafts	Geographical Indication for craft and industrial products.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/empowering-craft-heritage-new-geographic-indicators-for-crafts/
29	Geographical Indication for craft and industrial products: a new horizon for European craftsmanship	Geographical Indication for craft and industrial products: example of woodcarving.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/geographical-indication-for-craft-and-industrial-products-a-new-horizon-for-european-craftsmanship/
30	Woodcarving in Yecla: A documented legacy	History of Yecla Woodcarving. Crafts as heritage.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/woodcarving-in-yecla-a-documented-legacy/
31	Traditional Zmijanje Embroidery	UNESCO recognised craft as part of the ICH.	https://projects.madineurope.eu/craeft-community/traditional-zmijanje-embroidery/

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D6.4 Community, methodology and results



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