

COMMHERITOUR

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

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Crafting Accessible Experiences

Product development workshop

This summary highlights how traditional crafts can boost sustainable tourism by designing accessible experience routes, strengthening touchpoints, and repositioning craft heritage as meaningful, authentic visitor experiences.

Keywords: *Craft heritage – experience design – tourism routes – customer journey*

1. Why crafts matter for sustainable tourism

Central Europe is rich in living craft traditions (textile work, ceramics, wood carving, lace making, basket weaving, and more). These are not just beautiful products; they are cultural memories shaped by local materials, knowledge, and identity. **Today, crafts have a renewed role: they help regions create authentic, responsible tourism experiences that avoid mass-market clichés.**



Crafts contribute to all three pillars of sustainability:

Environmental: many crafts use natural or recycled materials and rely on low-impact, slow production.

Social: they strengthen identity and intergenerational links, especially in rural or declining regions.

Economic: they diversify local economies and create new income opportunities for artisans and small family businesses.

When done respectfully, **tourism can give endangered traditions a new life by valuing craftsmanship as part of a real, place-bound cultural experience.**

2. Supportive policies and frameworks

The workshop highlights several policy models that successfully support craft heritage:

- **The Hungarikum Act (Hungary):** a recognition system that connects local values to national branding, supporting education, product protection, and tourism use.

- **UNESCO Intangible Heritage listings:** boosting visibility of crafts such as Kalocsa embroidery or Croatian lacemaking.
- **European programmes (e.g., Creative Europe):** encouraging innovation, digital tools, and cross-border cooperation.

These frameworks work because they combine legal protection with practical tools, enabling communities to use heritage sustainably and creatively.

3. From products to experiences

Modern **consumers value experiences more than objects**. In tourism, this means visitors want emotional engagement, creativity, and participation, not just souvenirs. Craft heritage fits perfectly into this shift:

- demonstrations,
- hands-on workshops,
- artisan encounters,
- storytelling and community events.

Experiences transform crafts from static goods into dynamic, co-created memories.

4. Designing customer journeys and experience routes

Crafts must be placed within meaningful service flows. Using **service design** helps identify:

- what visitors expect,
- where they interact with the craft,
- how different touchpoints (arrival, learning, buying, sharing) shape the experience.

This moves craft valorisation from preservation to innovation. It also encourages collaboration with gastronomy, design, wellness, or education, enriching the tourism offer.

5. Accessibility challenges – and how to solve them

Participants discuss real barriers that prevent craft experiences from being fully accessible:

Language: Many artisans struggle to communicate with international visitors, limiting storytelling and engagement.

“Is it worth the detour?” Craft locations often sit off the main route, so they need stronger positioning within tourism itineraries.

Capacity and sales skills: Producers may lack the time or know-how to manage visitor traffic or sell products effectively.

Physical & digital accessibility: Many craft venues are not fully accessible for people with disabilities, and digital tools (like translations or e-commerce) are often missing.

The goal is to make craft experiences inclusive, smooth, and easy to reach.

Solutions include:

- partnerships (DMOs – destination management organisations, guides, retailers),
- translation apps or multilingual materials,
- online sales or pre-ordering options,
- accessible design standards,
- integrated tourism route planning.

6. How crafts are being repositioned today

Across Europe, crafts are undergoing a creative revival:

- Experiences replace “Product-only Tourism”.
- Digital tools (AR trails, virtual marketplaces) help artisans reach global audiences.
- Sustainability trends increase interest in handmade, local, ethical products.
- Crafts intersect with fashion, gastronomy, design, festivals, and wellness.
- EU programmes invest in youth engagement, rural development, and innovation.

Crafts are no longer peripheral - they are becoming strategic cultural assets.

7. Case studies

Idrija Lace (Slovenia): From complementary product to core attraction - Built a powerful identity around lace making, supported by its 19th-century lace school, UNESCO listing, young designers, and a long-running festival. Strong storytelling and heritage infrastructure helped the craft evolve into a contemporary tourism highlight integrated with the town’s cultural landscape.

Zsolnay (Hungary): Craft heritage as urban cultural regeneration - Transformed from an industrial ceramics brand into a cultural symbol of Pécs. The Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, created during the European Capital of Culture program, separates production from cultural functions and integrates exhibitions, festivals, architecture, and design collaborations. Zsolnay now blends luxury heritage with modern lifestyle products and creative industries.

The Busó Festivities (Hungary): Intangible heritage through lived experience - Shows how crafts (especially mask carving) can be part of immersive, community-led tourism. The festival’s UNESCO recognition, local revival efforts, the Busóudvar Museum, and the work of master carvers like Endre Rosta demonstrate how tradition, performance, and hands-on participation create an emotional, experiential tourism product. Visitors can learn carving, cook with locals, join processions, and feel part of a living ritual.

8. What the workshop ultimately demonstrates

Crafts become powerful tourism drivers when they are accessible, story-rich, and embedded in well-designed experience routes. When heritage networks, policymakers, artisans, guides, and designers work together, they can create: stronger tourism linkages, more inclusive visitor experiences, sustainable local value, and preserved cultural identity. **Crafts are not only artefacts of the past, but they are also catalysts for future tourism.**