

# Regional and local municipalities as enablers in heritage valorisation eco-system development

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## Introduction

In recent years, the role of local authorities in managing cultural ecosystems, including heritage valorisation, has undergone a profound transformation in the Danube Region, following long-established trends in Western Europe. The emergence of the cultural and creative industries (CCI) paradigm has redefined the logic of cultural management, moving from a traditional, institution-centered approach toward a more dynamic, network-based and innovation-driven model (Shakya, 2024; Bellver, 2023). This shift has fundamentally altered the role of local actors.

The need for the firm participation of local municipalities and regional authorities in the formation of the heritage crafts valorisation eco-system proved to be fundamental in the analytical works of the Commheritour project implemented by regional partners and their experts.

While in Western Europe this transformation has been underway for decades, in the Danube Region it has become increasingly visible only in recent years. The region's late adaptation reflects both a recognition of the economic potential of culture and an effort to get aligned with European cultural policy frameworks. The development of local heritage valorisation ecosystems promoted within the **COMMHERITOUR** initiative represents a practical response to these shifts. It seeks to operationalize abstract paradigms of change into concrete local practices (local eco-systems, local action plans, local pilots), translating the global discourse on cultural ecosystems into region-specific strategies and governance models.

Culture is now systematically integrated into broader local and regional development strategies, coordinated by local authorities. This integration links artistic and creative initiatives with tourism, education, economic growth, and social inclusion. The **COMMHERITOUR** eco-system model reflects this multidimensional reality: it is multi-actor, participatory, and heavily reliant on community engagement. Within this evolving framework, heritage valorisation is no longer an isolated field of preservation but part of a living, interconnected cultural economy where crafts, creative entrepreneurship, and cultural tourism reinforce one another (EU CAP Network, 2025; Keep.eu, 2025).

Traditionally, local authorities primarily acted as regulators, funders, and custodians of heritage institutions such as museums, libraries, or galleries. Their role focused on maintaining infrastructure and safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural assets. However, the paradigm shift within the cultural sector has repositioned municipalities as facilitators of innovation and collaboration. They now support local artisans, creative entrepreneurs, and community-based initiatives, fostering environments where cultural activities generate both economic and social value (Gocer, 2024). In this sense, heritage valorisation ecosystems—such as those emerging through **COMMHERITOUR**—embody the characteristics of creative ecosystems, albeit at varying levels of maturity depending on local institutional capacity and civic engagement.

Sustainability and social impact have also become central to cultural governance in the region. Local authorities now deploy culture as tools to strengthen local identity, foster intergenerational knowledge transfer, engage youth, promote gender equality and inclusion, and revitalize rural or marginalized communities (Candeloro, 2025) as COMMHERITOUR ambitions it.

## **Valorising Crafts Heritage in Remote Rural Areas: The Role of Municipalities and Regional Authorities**

The valorisation of crafts heritage in remote rural areas is more than a cultural endeavour—it is a **strategic pathway for sustainable economic and social development**. In this context, the involvement of municipalities and regional authorities is not optional; it is essential. In **COMMHERITOUR** also defines them as *key actors* having mostly neither the market nor the civic stakeholders ready to take over their place in their still necessary coordinative role.

Their engagement provides the institutional support, coordination, and resources necessary to preserve traditions, strengthen local economies, and ensure long-term continuity. The valorisation of crafts heritage in remote rural areas requires a complex, ecosystem based approach. Municipalities play a fundamental role in transforming traditional crafts into dynamic assets that contribute to local economies, cultural identity, and social cohesion. This process involves a comprehensive strategy and community engagement, infrastructure development, capacity building, tourism integration, wider regional policy support and the like.

**Policy Support:** Effective policy support is crucial for the sustainability of crafts heritage valorisation. Authorities understand that craft valorisation, if structured, can become a sustainable source of employment in remote areas. Municipalities can provide *financial incentives*, such as micro-grants and subsidies, and *foster public-private partnerships* to encourage investment in crafts. Municipalities play a critical role in **policy** and governance, ensuring that craft initiatives align with local development, tourism, and cultural strategies. They possess the authority to grant heritage status, implement zoning protections, and enforce regulations that safeguard traditional practices.

Municipalities and regional authorities are crucial for ensuring **sustainability and a long-term vision as firm base for supportive policies (See Local Action Plan for the Heritage Crafts Valorisation)**. Individual projects may fade, but strategic planning ensure continuity. By combining governance, investment, coordination, education, and promotion, local and regional authorities transform craft heritage from isolated traditions into thriving, sustainable drivers of local development in rural areas too.

**Community Engagement:** Engaging local communities in decision-making processes ensures that valorisation efforts align with their values and needs, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage [eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu). **Co-creation with locals** ensure artisans and communities are directly involved in decisions. Craft valorisation can be used to support community cohesion and cultural pride, and it is a method municipalities may use to reinforce connections to a particular place. Connecting young people with digital marketing and creative entrepreneurship around crafts is also a mission of local eco-system building.

**Coordination and networking** are other key contributions of municipalities and regional authorities. By acting as a *bridge* between artisans, tourism operators, cultural institutions, and educational bodies, they foster *collaborative networks* of craft villages, museums, and markets. Such clustering strengthens the sector, avoiding isolated efforts and maximizing economic impact. Furthermore, authorities can *enhance visibility* by integrating crafts into regional tourism

circuits, festivals, and local branding initiatives, thereby promoting both cultural identity and economic growth.

**Capacity Building and Innovation:** Municipalities can support artisans by providing training in areas such as product design, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing and by integrating crafts into local education and apprenticeship programs, authorities ensure the transmission of knowledge to future generations. These initiatives ensure that traditional crafts remain competitive in contemporary markets while preserving their authenticity. Furthermore, fostering innovation through collaborations between artisans and contemporary designers can lead to the creation of market-relevant products, thereby expanding the reach of local crafts. Municipal support also extends to **capacity building and education**. Through funding for workshops on digital skills, business management, and design, Economically, structured craft initiatives create jobs, stimulate local economies, prevent depopulation, and reinforce social cohesion by fostering community pride and cultural identity.

**Infrastructure:** Beyond policy, local authorities can provide crucial **infrastructure and investment**. Developing infrastructure is essential for both integrating crafts into the tourism sector and enhancing community activity. Establishing craft villages, cultural centers, or workshop hubs provides artisans with spaces to produce, exhibit, and sell their work (like in the case of Jászberény – Roomli the creative hub) as well as provide venue for co-design, co-working in communities.

**Tourism and Marketing Integration:** Integrating crafts into the tourism sector can significantly enhance both visitor experiences and economic impact. Municipalities can promote experiential tourism through workshops, festivals, and local markets that allow tourists to engage hands-on with traditions. Additionally, linking crafts with other local attractions, such as gastronomy and heritage trails, creates comprehensive tourist circuits that encourage longer stays and increased spending. In the digital age, municipalities can assist artisans in reaching global audiences through e-commerce platforms, digital storytelling, and virtual reality experiences. *Regional branding initiatives* that position the area as a "Crafts Heritage Destination" can strengthen cultural identity and attract tourists, thereby contributing to the local.

**Documentation and Recognition:** The initial step in valorisation is the systematic documentation of local crafts, artisans, and associated traditions. This includes recording techniques, histories, and narratives that form the cultural fabric of the community. Municipalities can facilitate this process by supporting efforts to achieve national or international recognition, such as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage listings, which enhance the visibility and credibility of local crafts and open avenues for broader market access.

## Conclusion

**COMMHERITOUR** and similar initiatives aim to change the role of local authorities in culture from that of passive administrators to that of strategic enablers and ecosystem builders in the Danube Region. By embracing cultural and creative industries as instruments of development, they may become enabled to orchestrate complex networks that connect heritage, innovation, and community empowerment. This evolution represents not only a managerial transformation but also a cultural reorientation—one that positions local governance at the heart of sustainable and participatory heritage valorisation.

## References

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