

# Potentials of digital tools in the heritage valorisation eco-system<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction: Digitalisation and Heritage Valorisation

As we all learnt from COMMHERITOUR heritage valorisation has become an increasingly complex and dynamic field, shaped by cultural, social, economic, and technological transformations. Cultural heritage (particularly local crafts, skills, and intangible knowledge) is no longer perceived solely as an object of preservation, but as a **living resource** that contributes to local identity, social cohesion, education, tourism, and economic development.

Within this evolving context, **digitalisation plays a central role** in enabling heritage to remain relevant, accessible, and sustainable.

Digital tools offer new ways to *document, interpret, share, and activate heritage assets*. It also supports innovation in governance, business models, and community engagement. As heritage valorisation ecosystems involve a wide range of **stakeholders** (local authorities, cultural institutions, creative professionals, craftspeople, small enterprises, educators, tourists, and local communities) digital solutions provide a common framework that enhances *connectivity, transparency, and collaboration*.

In this context, the integration of digital tools into Heritage Crafts Valorisation Local Action Planning (LAP) is everything but optional. It is a strategic necessity for achieving COMMHERITOUR Specific Objective 1 (SO1) ambitions focused on knowledge sharing, community building, and core valorisation ecosystem development, as well as Specific Objective 2 (SO2), which addresses economic sustainability, market access, and innovation capacity of heritage based activities like tourism as well as production.

Digitalisation enables both objectives to be addressed in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner.

## 2. Preconditions for Effective Digitalisation in Heritage Ecosystems

The successful application of digital tools in heritage valorisation depends on several core conditions that must be addressed in thematic and targeted digitalisation strategies.

- An **adequate technological background** is necessary. This includes access to digital infrastructure, suitable platforms (e.g. HeriCraftMarket Platform), data storage solutions, and user-friendly tools (e.g. visitor friendly digital info board in Central-Istria) that can be adapted to local contexts. Importantly, technological solutions should be scalable and

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main deliverables of COMMHERITOUR addresses the assessment of the partner institutions as well as of the eight Commheritour regions in terms of digital preparedness in the field of cultural industries, heritage crafts valorisation in particular. A survey was conducted among PPs and a finally a comparative study was produced (D.2.1.3 Potentials of digital tools in DR heritage market)

interoperable, allowing heritage data and services to grow over time and connect with wider regional, national, or European systems.

- Institutional and **organisational preparedness** is essential. Stakeholders must be open to adopting digital approaches, willing to rethink traditional workflows, and capable of integrating digital solutions into existing governance and operational frameworks (e.g. on-line training materials for crafts in the Heritage House in Hungary). Without a shared understanding of the benefits and implications of digitalisation, even well-designed tools risk remaining underused.
- **Human capacities and skills** play a decisive role. Digital heritage initiatives require not only technical expertise, but also *interdisciplinary competencies combining cultural knowledge, communication, management, and design*. Capacity-building measures (such as training, mentoring, and peer learning) are therefore a critical component of any digitalisation effort.

### 3. Digital Tools in SO1 Topics: Strengthening the Heritage Ecosystem

- *Systematic Data Management and Knowledge Infrastructure*: Within SO1 topics, one of the most important digitalisation measures concerns systematic data management. Data may concern heritage itself (by different features) and the pursuers of heritage crafts and other relevant stakeholders. Structured and well-maintained data serves as the backbone of informed decision-making at both organisational and ecosystem levels. **Digital tools can support the collection, organisation, and analysis of data related to heritage assets, stakeholders, audiences, and activities.** Such data-driven approaches allow organisations to better understand their environment, identify gaps and opportunities, and evaluate the impact of their actions. At ecosystem level, shared data platforms can foster coordination among actors and contribute to evidence-based policy-making.
- *Digitalised Business and Operational Models*: Another key area within SO1 is the adaptation of business and operational models. Heritage-related organisations (such as museums, collections, research institutes, training centres) increasingly rely on digital workflows for project management, communication, archiving, and service delivery. Digital process management tools can improve efficiency, transparency, and accountability, while reducing administrative burdens. Digitalisation also enables hybrid models that combine physical and digital activities, such as blended learning formats, online-offline exhibitions, or digitally supported events. These models increase resilience and adaptability, particularly in times of crisis or rapid change.
- *Service Design and Digitalisation Strategies*: To fully exploit the potential of digital tools, organisations and heritage ecosystems need to adopt service design approaches and develop dedicated digitalisation strategies. These strategies may operate at the level of individual organisations or at a broader ecosystem level, covering networks of actors and shared objectives of the heritage valorisation system. When aligned with smart city or smart region strategies, digital heritage initiatives can benefit from synergies with urban innovation, tourism development, education, and creative industries. This alignment also increases the visibility of heritage within broader development agendas and supports integrated **territorial approaches**, which is a main concern of Local Action Plans in COMMHERITOUR.
- *Communication, Community Building, and Youth Engagement*: Digital tools play a crucial role in communication and community (stakeholder) engagement. Strengthening and modernising social media presence allows heritage actors to reach wider and more

diverse audiences through high cultural value content, including static visuals, video materials, interactive digital surfaces, and innovative web designs. Online platforms are particularly effective in engaging younger generations, who are often underrepresented in traditional heritage activities. Through digital storytelling, participatory content creation, and interactive formats, young people can become active contributors rather than passive consumers of heritage.

- *Digital Archives and E-learning*: The creation of digital archives represents another cornerstone of SO1-related digitalisation. At appropriate territorial scales (urban centres, micro-regions, or regions) digital archives enable the documentation, systematisation, and searchability of sound recordings, still images, and motion picture materials related to local crafts and heritage. Beyond preservation, these archives serve as a resource for education and knowledge transfer. Digital tools allow archival content to be transformed into tailored e-learning materials for specific target groups, such as students, professionals, or community members. This approach supports lifelong learning and intergenerational knowledge exchange. (e.g., Heritage House in Hungary).

#### 4. Digital Tools in SO2 Topics: Economic Sustainability and Market Integration

While SO1 focuses primarily on ecosystem development and knowledge, SO2 topics address the economic dimension of heritage valorisation especially in tourism services and product design with market ambitions. Here, digital tools play a critical role in enhancing competitiveness, innovation capacity, and market access for heritage-related activities.

- *Capacity Building for Small Enterprises*: A key digitalisation measure within SO2 is the creation and implementation of training programmes for local small enterprises, particularly craftspeople and micro-businesses. These programmes aim to improve business administration, financial management, marketing, and customer relations through the use of digital tools. By strengthening digital literacy and management skills, such initiatives contribute to the long-term sustainability of heritage-based businesses and reduce vulnerability to market fluctuations.
- *Connecting Heritage Businesses with Innovation Ecosystems*: Another important area concerns the development of tools that connect small heritage businesses with technology companies, innovation hubs, and research centres. These connections enable access to expertise in areas such as digital product design, prototyping, branding, and user experience. Such collaborations foster innovation while respecting the authenticity and cultural value of heritage products and services. This application falls under CCI.
- *Digital Tools for Tourism and Experience Design*: At the level of concrete LAP actions, digital tools can support experience-based tourism and market-oriented activities. Examples include:
  - launching repeated local surveys to monitor how crafts and heritage are perceived within the mental maps of tourists (consumer attitude survey in Commheritour)
  - developing tourism packages that use digitally assisted, agile solutions to enhance visitor experiences centred on culture and crafts;
  - improving the attractiveness of physical touchpoints by installing digital visualisation tools based on digitised heritage data (Central Istria pilot in Commheritour);

- enhancing the online experience of potential buyers of crafted goods and heritage-related services through improved platforms and storytelling.

These measures contribute to creating coherent and high-quality visitor journeys, while also increasing the economic value generated by heritage.

## **5. Conclusion**

Digital tools represent a strategic asset across both SO1 and SO2 elements of the COMMHERITOUR eco-system model, enabling heritage valorisation ecosystems to become more visible, participatory, knowledge-based, and economically sustainable. When integrated into Local Action Planning, digitalisation supports not only preservation and promotion, but also innovation, learning, and resilience.

By investing in preparedness, skills, and infrastructure, and by aligning digital initiatives with broader territorial strategies, heritage actors can ensure that cultural heritage remains a living and dynamic resource - deeply rooted in local contexts, yet fully connected to the digital age.