

No. 14	<b>CO/RIZOM</b>	Austria	Northeastern Austria	Vienna
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## Categories of cultural heritage

Professional craftspeople	Knowledge transfer	Presentation of crafts	Network for preservation of crafts	Local community building	Crafts within tourism
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## Description

The *co/rizom network* (corizom in the following text) is a network of artisans, business developers and creatives - a collaborative initiative established to address global challenges through interconnected and community-driven solutions, where they seek innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity within (traditional) handicrafts. It was set up in 2018 as a spin-off from an ERSTE Foundation social development program, developing into the incubator for craft – an international programme targeting artisans, designers and business professionals coming together to create collections. It was created to bridge gaps between individuals, organizations, and communities working on similar goals, enabling knowledge sharing and cross-disciplinary, non-hierarchical collaboration. The primary purpose of the network is to create a dynamic ecosystem where local solutions can contribute to global progress, particularly in areas like sustainable development, education, and social empowerment. Through its decentralized structure, corizom supports grassroots initiatives while connecting them to broader resources and opportunities. They have engaged 60 artisans from 23 communities across 13 countries (Albania, Austria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Nigeria, Nepal, Portugal, Slovenia and Romania), including 23 different craft types (such as kilim manufacture, wood carving, textiles, pottery, metal smithing, and cat tail weaving) and have developed over 250 products into successful collections.

## Types of handicrafts

Pottery Knitting Weaving Woodworking	Embroidery Leatherworking Herbalism Culinary craft	Candle making Glassblowing Copper engraving Quilting Jewellery making	Basket weaving Stonemasonry Blacksmithing Traditional agriculture practice
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## Craft touchpoints - where to find?

### Workshop of an artisan (directly from the craftsman)

Handicraft Centre of more than one local artisan

Regular local market

Local festival

Shop selling local artisans' products

Local tourism agency / souvenir shop

**Web-shops**

**Social media accounts**

## What can we learn?

<p><b>Heritage preservation / valorisation practice</b></p>	<p>What do they expose with their practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Corizom's aim is to safeguard and enhance the cultural, historical, and artistic value of traditional crafts and practices. They showcase the richness and diversity of cultural heritage across Europe and wider (i.e. Nigeria, Colombia), emphasizing the historical roots of traditional crafts and trying to preserve these as well. They emphasize the importance of passing down techniques, materials, and cultural meanings from one generation to the next.</li> <li>● They bring attention to the relationship between artisans, their communities, and the environments in which they live and work. They highlight the potential of these crafts as part of fair trade markets, tourism, and regional economies and how traditional crafts can support livelihoods and provide economic independence for artisans. They also highlight the inherent sustainability of many of the traditional crafts, such as the use of local, renewable, or recycled materials.</li> <li>● The network showcases how traditional heritage can adapt to contemporary aesthetics and markets without losing its authenticity, like incorporating traditional motifs and techniques into modern design or functional objects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Success factors</b></p>	<p>Achievements and strengths that make this case inspiring for other attempts in the DR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The network has a community-centred approach, where they actively involve individual artisans in decision-making. Since the network's position is to help local, traditional artisans reach wider markets due to an increase in demand for handmade, quality products, the network works with each artisan to help them develop digital, marketing and other tools and skills. These are key for successful and economically fruitful operations.</li> <li>● They operate on a decentralized principle, where they connect artisans with creatives and business professionals to develop collections for a global audience; these teams of equal members are called PODs. The network then</li> </ul>

		<p>provides the means to empower each POD with the financial resources to develop a first collection (like Eclectic, The Power of Three, We know how to make it – Trials, errors, and what we’ve learned so far – see Vienna Design Week Archive for more).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Corizom’s work is spearheaded by the idea of sustainability. One aspect is economic sustainability, where the network builds on the demand for handmade, small-business products, and provides the artisans market access with promoting fair trade practices, utilizing online platforms, helping with branding and storytelling. The other aspect is environmental sustainability, where the network focuses on promoting the eco-friendly practices of artisans and engages in circular economy practices to encourage minimal waste, recycling, reuse, and all-round low impact production methods.</li> <li>● Another success factor is corizom’s work on showcasing the attractiveness of the blend of the traditional and the modern, integrating the traditional practices and designs with the more contemporary ones. With hosting exhibitions, workshops, and festivals to increase public appreciation and awareness of heritage crafts, they are also successful in their efforts to revitalize and sustain crafts at risk of disappearing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local community involvement</b></p>	<p>Fundamental values that help to connect the target groups for the social prosperity of the area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Projects are co-created with local artisans and stakeholders, ensuring their voices are central to the process. The network calls these local collaborating groups of artisan-creative-business provider PODs. This type of collaboration also mobilizes artisans’ local or regional networks and organizations. In late 2024 the network also launched co/fab, an inner collective of designers, artisans and business professionals specifically dedicated to empowering communities through design-based innovation of traditional crafts for a fairer design industry.</li> <li>● Workshops, demonstrations and similar events and other local connections and partnerships that are organized by the network’s help are important for artisans to pass on traditional techniques to younger generations and thus key for knowledge transmission in a specific area or region.</li> <li>● Whole local communities are empowered through the network’s work with an artisan through their promotion and expansion to</li> </ul>

		<p>global markets. Recognition that the area gains this way can be beneficial economically, but also in terms of cultural recognition, local tourism enhancement etc. For example, Victor Clopotar's (metalsmith) brand named VCR Exclusive from Brateiu, Romania was launched in Venice in collaboration with Andrei Georgescu and Nadja Zerunian and is distributed through the corizom sales network. Clopotar is a traditional Roma Artisan from Transylvania, born into a family of Caldarari where he was trained as a coppersmith and his work now serves as a platform for recognizing Caldarari work and education on Roma history.</p>
<p><b>Link to professional network</b></p>	<p>Reflecting on its strategic position in the region; making the most of networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The network actively engages with professional networks at local, regional, and international levels. This interconnected approach allows the network to amplify its impact, create synergies, and unlock opportunities for artisans and communities. They partner on more levels, locally with local artisan guilds and cooperatives, museums, cultural institutions, and heritage foundations, as well as local tourism agencies and cultural festivals to position crafts as essential cultural experiences.</li> <li>● On a wider scale, corizom collaborates with non-profit organizations, foundations, design shows (Distributed Design Conference), curators, online retailers, and publications around the world. This includes collaborations with design festivals (Paris Design Week, Vienna Design Week, Romanian Design Week), cultural institutes (Romanian Cultural Institute), consortiums (Diapason Consortium), and many other platforms and networks for craft promotion (Made In, 5VIE Network, Homo Faber). By accessing and mobilizing all of the mentioned resources, corizom builds on all these professional and non-professional networks and connections to enhance artisan visibility and drive innovation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication</b></p>	<p>The use of social networks to disseminate and promote their mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● They use Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and other similar platforms to promote their mission through visual storytelling, showcasing artisan work, and providing updates on events (Paris Design Week updates with artisan profiles), products (Little Monsters Collection), and collaborations.</li> <li>● They engage followers by sharing behind-the-scenes content (i.e. Instagram posts unveiling a collaboration with artisans from Belarus at Milano Design Week 2022), artisan profiles</li> </ul>

		<p>(Instagram and YouTube video series with artisan profiles, i.e. Zaza Gatenashvili, POD members series on Instagram) and stories. Social media helps corizom connect with a wider audience and amplify its message of cultural preservation and ethical craftsmanship.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability factor</b></p>	<p>Operations and maintenance that drive the practice forward; opportunities for financial sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The sustainability of corizom’s operations relies on their partnerships, promoting traditional crafts in global markets, and implementing fair trade practices. Key factors include establishing online platforms for artisan sales, cultivating a strong network of collaborators, efficient operations and long-term maintenance practices and investing in skill-building programs.</li> <li>● Financial sustainability is supported by diversifying revenue streams, such as through workshops, product sales, and partnerships with cultural institutions, while ensuring long-term viability through digital outreach, awareness campaigns, and community engagement to continuously grow the network and its impact. The network was initially created under the Erste Foundation and they continue to operate with their help, Alongside organizations, initiatives or individuals already mentioned above, they also work closely with Powered by People, Vienna Business Agency, Passa ao Futuro and others that provide them with financial sustainability.</li> </ul>

**What makes it a best practice?**

Co/rizom is effective as a network due to the collaborative approach, integrating artisans, designers, researchers, and local communities to protect and promote traditional crafts. They are developing a roadmap that links small handicraft enterprises with larger companies. It is designed to bring traditional crafts to a wider market and ensure their long-term sustainability.

The network builds on essential competences to build a successful craft business, which in their opinion has to include a traditional artisan, a creative with an idea based on a traditional craft or someone who would like to support a local craft register, creating the so-called POD.

Inclusion into the network then entails step by step processes of learning to use simple digital tools, getting funding for a small collection, as well as input from renowned creative, global marketing and sales experts, participation in curated global shows, public relations, communications distribution and sales of the collection.

This methodology enables artisans from vulnerable communities – grouped into small social enterprises, aka PODs – to become reliable and trusted suppliers of major retailers. It also ensures their financial stability, giving them a solid basis for financial independence. The network draws on legislation supporting cultural heritage and fair-trade practices to safeguard artisan rights and promote sustainable livelihoods. Their success stems from building digital platforms for visibility, creating partnerships with local markets and global networks. These strategies have proven successful, as they address both cultural preservation and economic empowerment. Contextualizing their work in local traditions and adapting it to global markets ensures long-term sustainability.

## Contact information

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