

No. 5	Damsko srce	Serbia	Pirot District, South-eastern Serbia	Pirot
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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

Description
In 2005, now Damsko srce's director Slavica Ćirić founded the Association for Nurturing and Preserving Ancient and Artistic Crafts <i>Grlica</i> in Pirot, focusing on training people in embroidery, knitting, crochet, weaving, and pottery. From there, in 2009, the same founder established the <i>Damsko Srce</i> Craft Cooperative, realizing that Pirot carpet weaving, a craft of national importance, was at risk of disappearing. This prompted the creation of the initiative, focused specifically on training women and employing them to weave Pirot carpets, ensuring that the skill would not be lost and the traditional handicraft would be preserved. At the moment, the workshop remains the sole producer of original Pirot kilims.

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

Craft touchpoints - where to find?	
Workshop of an artisan (directly from the craftsman) Handicraft Centre of more than one local artisan Regular local market	Shop selling local artisans' products Local tourism agency / souvenir shop Web-shops

## 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>• The Damsko Scree initiative focuses on preserving the traditional craft of weaving Pirot kilims (handwoven rugs).</li> <li>• They aim to keep the craft alive, motivate young people to engage in it, and reestablish kilim weaving as a significant economic activity in Pirot.</li> <li>• The cooperative produces certified kilims and creates designs for various uses, highlighting the cultural heritage and artistic value of the Pirot kilim.</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 biggest success factor for the organization would be the knowledge transfer and overall efforts to keep a unique craft alive (also with ensuring its preservation under the UNESCO regulations) and further continuing its tradition.</li> <li>• A very important factor with the cooperative is also knowledge transmission and dissemination, since they have promoted the meanings of kilim patterns and traditions online, making this knowledge more widely accessible.</li> <li>• As a result, the cooperative is recognized as a good practice from different sources - they were awarded with many different awards, one of them being <i>The Guardian of Tradition 2018</i>, for exceptional contribution to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Serbia (awarded by the Ministry of Culture and Information of Serbia).</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>• The association employs and trains local women in traditional crafts such as embroidery, knitting, crocheting, weaving, and pottery. They aim to not only employ local women in creative workshops but also to preserve the traditional handicrafts.</li> <li>• Raising awareness and appreciation for this traditional handicraft among both locals and tourists through live demonstrations and educational storytelling about the kilim</li> <li>• They collaborate with different local organizations; they work closely with the local Tourist Organization of Pirot and the City of Pirot to market their products as souvenirs and ceremonial gifts.</li> </ul>
<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>• Additionally to local organizations listed above, they work with the Intellectual Property Office</li> </ul>

		<p>of the Republic of Serbia to protect the traditional Pirot kilim and its motifs and with the Ministry of Culture for the preservation and promotion of Pirot kilim, which is part of the national cultural heritage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were co-founders of a national network based in Belgrade aimed at preserving and promoting traditional crafts, though they are not part of it today, since over time they shifted their focus.</li> <li>• They have also been internationally promoted via Art I Zanat Serbia organization (that operates under Michelangelo foundation).</li> </ul>
Communication	The use of social networks to disseminate and promote their mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social networks (mainly Facebook and their webpage) are used to promote and valorize Pirot kilims by sharing the history and cultural significance of the craft and engaging with the audience.</li> <li>• Additionally, they use social media for marketing (though not selling the products on the internet), while effectively highlighting the cultural and artistic value of their handicrafts to a broader audience.</li> <li>• Their webpage provides a platform for knowledge transmission and dissemination (<a href="#">step-by-step</a> videos and the descriptions of making the kilims).</li> </ul>
Sustainability factor	Operations and maintenance that drive the practice forward; opportunities for financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cooperative mainly financially operates on sold kilims.</li> <li>• They earn money from tourism by allowing visitors to observe the weaving process and purchase products directly from their shop, however most of the products are made on demand – since the products are handmade, they are usually made to order.</li> <li>• Their collaboration with (local) tourism organizations and institutions provides access to new markets and additional funding opportunities (like grants), promotes their products as cultural certified products or souvenirs, further attracting customers.</li> </ul>

What makes it a best practice?

Damsko Srce exemplifies successful knowledge transfer through its structured training programs, community events, and intergenerational mentoring. They are an important actor in knowledge transfer, particularly through the commitment to skill transmission, which is essential for preserving traditional crafts like Pirot kilim weaving. Damsko Srce implements comprehensive training initiatives that are designed not only to teach weaving skills but also to instill a deep understanding of the cultural significance. They emphasize a collaborative approach to learning, where experienced weavers mentor newcomers. The training is aimed primarily at women, enabling them to learn directly from experienced artisans, thereby facilitating intergenerational (and intragenerational) knowledge transfer. The cooperative's training programs often last several years (the founder states it usually takes 5 years of 8-hour workdays to acquire the weaving skill), ensuring that participants acquire the necessary expertise to produce high-quality kilims. The cooperative actively organizes workshops and events that draw both locals and tourists. These gatherings serve as platforms for showcasing traditional weaving techniques and the stories behind them, allowing participants to engage directly with the artisans.

## Contact information

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