



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

Pomelaj was founded as a project in 1997, with the initiative of so-called learning workshops, to provide employment opportunities in rural areas, focusing particularly on entrepreneurs of Slovenia's rural Prekmurje region. Over time, the initiative developed into a cooperative in 2003, focused on preserving Prekmurje's traditional crafts, like weaving and local culinary practices, while including marginalized communities. The main purpose of Pomelaj is to revive cultural heritage, foster local craftsmanship, and support the employment of vulnerable groups, making it a unique model of socially responsible rural development in Slovenia.

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 event/festival

Shop selling local artisans' products
 Local tourism agency / souvenir shop
 Web-shops
 Social media accounts

What can we learn?

<p>Heritage preservation / valorisation practice</p>	<p>What do they expose with their practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomelaj's heritage preservation practice highlights traditional crafts like weaving with natural materials (corn husks or branches) and the culinary arts of Prekmurje. In addition to the aforementioned traditional handicrafts, their organization site also doubles as a traditional rural homestead, offering an architectural insight, too. • By reviving these practices, they valorize local heritage, bringing attention to the cultural value of handicrafts and recipes specific to the region. Their work emphasizes the role of artisanal skills in community identity, while also making these traditions relevant for modern audiences through workshops, products, and educational initiatives. • This approach not only conserves traditional knowledge but also creates sustainable economic opportunities for locals.
<p>Success factors</p>	<p>Achievements and strengths that make this case inspiring for other attempts in the DR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomelaj's achievements and strengths include becoming one of the recognized craft centres of Slovenia, although being a relatively new establishment. • Their work in reviving traditional weaving and local cuisine has brought widespread recognition, culminating in their craft of corn-husk weaving being registered as intangible cultural heritage. • Their international recognition, for example being included in the Homo Faber Guide. • Their model of engaging vulnerable community members for employment and partnering with local farmers and artisans exemplifies sustainable development. This integration of cultural heritage, community support, and economic resilience makes Pomelaj a powerful example for other heritage-driven social enterprises, successfully integrating cultural preservation with social responsibility.
<p>Local community involvement</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"> • Pomelaj deeply involves the local community through employment, partnerships, and cultural events, creating a network of farmers, artisans, and residents who contribute to and benefit from its projects. • Core values such as social responsibility, heritage preservation, and inclusivity shape

		<p>Pomelaj's mission, fostering pride and sense of identity in local traditions, as well as providing jobs to vulnerable groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These values help bridge connections between community members, encouraging mutual support and helping to build a sustainable, culturally rich rural economy that enhances social prosperity in the Prekmurje, namely the wider Mala Polana area.
<p>Link to professional network</p>	<p>Reflecting on its strategic position in the region; making the most of networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomelaj leverages its strategic position within Prekmurje by actively connecting with local and national networks. • Through partnerships with the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism, and Sport, as well as the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, but also with local cultural institutions, and regional cooperatives, Pomelaj secures funding and support that enable it to sustain and expand its programs. • Collaborations with organizations like the Slovenian Enterprise Fund and inclusion in international networks, such as the Homo Faber Guide, elevate its profile, showcasing Prekmurje's heritage and crafts. This networking approach enhances Pomelaj's impact, positioning it as a model for heritage-based social enterprises.
<p>Communication</p>	<p>The use of social networks to disseminate and promote their mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomelaj uses mainly Facebook to promote its mission of preserving traditional crafts and supporting social inclusion. Through posts, they showcase the craftsmanship behind their products, share updates on events, workshops, and new product releases, but also inform and reach out to the local community for help (especially with bigger projects, i.e.. corn-husking or harvesting). • The current Pomelaj leadership has plans for the future development of their social media accounts, mainly their presence on Instagram and Etsy, where they hope to be selling their products internationally as well.
<p>Sustainability factor</p>	<p>Operations and maintenance that drive the practice forward; opportunities for financial sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pomelaj ensures sustainability by combining cultural preservation with economic and social initiatives. • They drive operations forward through product sales, workshops, and partnerships with local farmers and artisans, who supply raw materials like heritage corn. • Financially, Pomelaj benefits from support as a registered handicraft center and as an employment center, which provides government subsidies for hiring individuals with employment challenges. • By expanding sales channels, including plans for Etsy, and developing new, heritage-inspired products, Pomelaj taps into both local and

		international markets to support long-term financial sustainability.
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What makes it a best practice?

Pomelaj stands out mainly for their local community building. The idea for Pomelaj was in fact initiated with building on local entrepreneurship welfare. They have further effectively fostered local community engagement by building around the values of heritage, inclusivity, and social responsibility, forming strong roots in the region of Prekmurje. Their work is based on different legislations that highlight hiring individuals facing employment challenges, allowing Pomelaj to establish an employment center status that supports subsidized job creation. Their integration of traditional handicrafts, especially weaving with corn husks, linked them with legislation promoting intangible cultural heritage, securing funding to preserve these skills. Their further success lies in collaborations with regional artisans and local farmers, creating community bonds that support both agricultural and craft practices. For example, corn husks, Pomelaj's signature weaving material, are sourced from local farmers and their sourcing built on reciprocity – the farmer provides the field and work for free in exchange for Pomelaj's employees' help with husking. Furthermore, they provide a platform for knowledge transfer of local traditional handicrafts with offering different types of workshops and demonstrations on-site. Their method of employing only local residents, especially those with limited job prospects, has created a tightly knit network that values both people and cultural heritage, making it a sustainable, community-driven initiative.

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