

# Supporting the Heritage Crafts Valorization Eco-System through legislation: The Case Of Slovenia

*Additional training for the COMMHERITOUR partnership to help with the policy recommendation output*

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In this workshop we would like to outline the logic of the new Slovenian legislation for conservation and development of handicrafts field and present some fieldwork aspects from well-cooperating national system of craft centres, mostly in the case of Škofja Loka, which is currently also the head of Consortium Craft Centres of Slovenia. We would focus mainly on how is the legislation implemented in practice – positive effects and the challenges that arise with its implementation.

## **Shortly about the Slovenian legislation background**

In 2014 **national alliance for craft** was formed with four different ministries, Consortium of Craft Centres, The Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia and some other actors which aimed for improvement of the craftspeople situation. This field was not consistently addressed and was dispersed among several sectors. After years of negotiation, research and comparative analysis of legislation in other countries we finally got **The Handicraft Preservation and Development Act**, which was published in 2023 under the Ministry for Economy, Tourism and Sport. This is the first holistic document which connects the field of handicrafts.

The legislation mainly builds on the good practices from the past (in Slovenia), but with new regulation principles for the state apparatus for public funds. The Act thus defines 71 handicraft disciplines, which are eligible of further measures and support for preservation and development. The Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, as a professional institution, is responsible for preparing a list of handicraft disciplines on behalf of the ministry. We understand this list as a living document which has already been updated and elaborated, depending on current needs of the field.

Furthermore, we could divide the Act in general on measures for craftspeople and measures for the support environment, which consists of crucial professional and social organisations: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Chamber of Crafts and Small Businesses of Slovenia, handicraft centers, Consortium of Craft Centres, and the Association of Pensioners' Societies of Slovenia.

If we break up measures a little bit further, there are:

- Measures for **craftspeople** (certification of quality handicraft products, transfer of knowledge according to the schemes which prescribes standards of knowledge and



competence for each handicraft discipline, open calls for financial grants for implementing new products and services, award of the Distinguished Artisan title etc.)

- Measures for a **support environment** that address the entire ecosystem in supporting the tasks of the new Act, providing financial support to organisations officially defined as part of the support system. We will present these tasks in more detail in the second section of this session.

### Practical experiences of evolving the supporting ecosystem

From the Craft Centers and Consortium point of view it is important to emphasize that based on this act these organizations are eligible to receive public funds covering part of the costs of work and the implementation of legal obligations. The Act is enforced by The Ministry for Economy, Tourism and Sport, and there are 1.600.000,00 euros funds allocated in the state budget. One third of the funds is intended for the tasks of stakeholders in the supportive environment, while two thirds are intended for open calls for proposals for craftspeople and craft organisations (for the development of craft products and craft projects).

We received first financial support for the coordination of the consortium and the craft center in September 2024, and currently we are co-financed according to the plan for 2025 and 2026 and are obliged to report our activities (tasks of the legislation measures) five times per year.

With the Act's adoption, a public call was issued for the official verification of organizations involved in the regional development of handicrafts as receiving official status of craft center — eight organizations met all the requirements and were verified. However, there are also other organizations in the field that are involved in the preservation and development of handicrafts but do not have the official status of a craft center yet. The Consortium of Craft Centres of Slovenia is not a legal entity, and one of its members takes over the management and leadership on a mandate basis. In the period 2023-2026, the head is the Arts and Crafts Centre Škofja Loka and as such **implements the tasks of the support ecosystem at both the local and national levels**. As leaders of Consortium, we coordinate implement operating tasks such as leading and evaluating the Consortium, as well as taking on the bulk of the organisation of annual events:

- representing and promoting the common interests of craft centers,
- monitoring legislation, informing and networking craftspeople throughout the country
- connecting and cooperating with other actors of support environment,
- negotiation between the state and the field for better craftspeople statuses, improvement of calls for proposals, economic and other obstacles etc.
- organizing bigger events, exhibitions, and implementing projects and campaigns for promoting craftsmanship: *Since 2023 we organize extensive **Slovene Handicraft Festival** in Brdo estate (national protocol center) in the first Sunday of June. This one day happening shows the selection of top-quality craftspeople from whole country at the handicraft fair, presents vocational schools, offers workshops for visitors, children programme, open-air exhibitions, information point of the support environment etc.*
- events for knowledge and skills transfer and popularization of craft for younger generations: *Since 2022 we organize very successful **Handicraft Camps** for youth on different locations and of different handicraft disciplines. (e.g. woodworking, pottery, glass*

*design techniques, ceramics design and stone processing, basket weaving, embroidery ...)*

**At the local and regional level**, we implement tasks for craft centres in accordance with the 15th article of the new law, as follows:

- implementation of the program and project activities of the handicraft center and care for their development,
- connecting and networking craftspeople on events and platforms, advising and supporting craftspeople (e.g. application on open calls, development of their career, brand or products), providing information and support on business organization
- monitoring issues related to craftsmanship, forming opinions and proposals,
- organizing and participating in exhibitions, events, and fairs,
- participation in international projects in the field of handicrafts,
- promotion of the transfer of handicraft skills, cooperation with educational institutions and other providers of education and training,
- recording, documenting, and developing handicraft disciplines.
- networking and cooperation with other stakeholders of support environment.

However, state funds only cover a part of our operational and staff costs so we actively work on providing other financial sources (EU and other projects, municipalities' funds ...).

### **Challenges following the acceptance of the new law/state financial support**

Both professionals in the support environment and craftspeople themselves are new to this legislative framework, which has affected our work in many positive ways but has also imposed some limitations and provided a complex reporting system. We would like to highlight some of the obstacles we have encountered, which are economic, functional and ideological in nature.

- Since the funds for managing the consortium do not cover full-time employment, we still do not have a person who could devote themselves full-time to managing the consortium and its activities.
- In case of open calls for grants, it is necessary to improve the calls' terms and conditions, the conditions for implementing craft projects, reporting methods, and simplify the associated bureaucracy.
- We believe that in the future, it will be necessary to develop a joint communication strategy for the umbrella brand 'Slovensko rokodelstvo' / Slovenian Handicrafts. Crafts are still too often communicated as a leisure activity that excludes young people, contemporary approaches based on tradition, and business opportunities offered by the relevance of craft skills and techniques in contemporary times. It is precisely these aspects that we also want to highlight in our efforts. We are already addressing this through the organisation of the Slovenian Handicraft Festival, current preparation of the exhibition about young craftspeople and regular communication, which we conduct through the consortium and individual craft centers
- Another important aspect is that craftsmanship is inherently extremely complex, and so are the issues, possible approaches, and ways of addressing challenges. With this in

mind, it is necessary to seek the most open possible solutions and to be aware that the process that has been started is a long-term one.

- On the basis of the law, it will be necessary to address other very important areas in the future – the development of educational programs for the transmission of knowledge and skills (including formal forms of education), tax legislation, the international positioning of Slovenian handicrafts, etc.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasise that Slovenian legislation was developed over a long period of time, during which decision-makers took into account existing organisations, infrastructure and examples of good practice, such as craft centres, associations and the certification of craft products. However, once the law was passed, we had to adapt to a much broader picture and consider the conditions and state bureaucracy. We have noticed that good and open communication and the transfer of information, experiences, and opinions between all stakeholders are essential in the implementation process—joint meetings and joint consideration of open issues are necessary.

It's important to note that, as the law is quite new, not everything has been tested in practice over the long term yet. Nevertheless, it is important to stress how important is to map existing practices, stakeholders and organisational scheme for craftspeople that are specific in each country and build the development with them. In Slovenian case it is important after the year of act's implementation all the stakeholders share the experiences and have open debate on improving systems and contents of the legislation. We believe that Slovenian case is positive, since given that most European countries do not have specific legislation addressing the handicrafts. The process is complex and there is essential that all stakeholders included are connected and open to improve the situation and approaches to safeguard and develop handicrafts.