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CRAFT, RURAL AREAS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: INSIGHTS FROM GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED WITHIN THE CULTURALITY PROJECT[1]

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a study on the potential of craft to revitalise rural areas within the framework of the European Culturality project, funded under Horizon Europe and running from 2024 to 2028. It is based on a theoretical and methodological approach that conceives of craft as a relational practice linked to the territory, integrating local knowledge, materials, ecological cycles and community dynamics. Using an interdisciplinary approach, a catalogue of good practices is developed based on variables such as sustainability, innovation, social impact and replicability, which guide the selection and analysis of some initiatives. The results show that craft can contribute to rural development and sustainable tourism when it is underpinned by community participation, collaborative governance, and the preservation of interdependencies between community, environment and local knowledge. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating tradition and innovation, diversifying economic activities, and strengthening intergenerational transmission. Taken together, craft emerges as a territorial epistemology that supports resilient economies and ways of life rooted in local areas.

Keywords: crafts; rural development; sustainable tourism; situated knowledge; cultural heritage; community governance.

INTRODUCTION

Can craft contribute to the revitalisation of rural areas? This question is addressed within CULTURALITY (CULTUral heritage in RurAL remote areas for creative tourism and sustainabilITY),[2] a Horizon Europe research and innovation project running from 2024 to 2027 and coordinated by the University of Oviedo.

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The project adopts a holistic approach, conceiving craft and cultural expressions as inseparable from the territories and communities in which they are produced and reproduced. Contemporary creative production is therefore considered alongside cultural and creative tourism, exploring their potential to contribute to sustainable rural development.[3]

One of the first steps of the project was the creation, in 2025, of an Inventory of Good Practices, led by La Ponte Research Centre and Ecomuseum, with the participation of the University of Tartu, the University of Oviedo, the University of St Andrews, Politecnico di Torino, Applied Arts Scotland SCIO, the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Espacio Tormaleo, Museum Nord and Region Värmland. Efforts were made to identify and select initiatives and projects across different geographical contexts using the following key terms: crafts, intangible heritage, tradition, innovation, design, territory, rural, sustainability and tourism in rural and remote areas. The process involved defining criteria and variables for identifying good practices, developing a common template, collecting examples from different global geographical contexts and analysing the selected initiatives. Rather than establishing a catalogue of models to be directly replicated, the inventory sought to identify the relationships, strategies and conditions that underpin these practices and may offer relevant insights for other rural contexts. This article presents a conceptual framework for the subsequent analysis, the methodology followed to develop the inventory, and an analysis of a selection of the initiatives identified through this process.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To consider craft practices independently of the territories in which they are embedded would overlook the social, cultural and environmental contexts that shape them. An ancestral or place-based practice can only be understood by tracing the footprints of its material and immaterial elements and components, beyond the finished piece or the specific cultural expression. A map of its interdependencies is required, where we find artisans, local materials, inhabited landscapes, lunar and seasonal cycles, non-human beings, both tangible and intangible, among many other things. Let us consider textiles, for example. The thread may come from a type of wild cotton, from specific fields, dyed with plant pigments linked to particular seasons, and woven using techniques that respond to community cycles. Or consider musical instruments: the reed may grow at specific altitudes, in step with the rhythms of transhumance, while its tuning carries acoustic knowledge passed down orally for generations. Or ceramics: the clay is extracted from local deposits and requires kilns fired with wood selected from nearby forests, and engraved motifs might recount collective memories. Each of these elements forms part of an invisible map of ecological, technical, and cultural relationships that folds into the final form, turning the object or the intangible element into a territory in itself. Not a mere representation, but a living composition traversed by affections, uses, rhythms, and multiple presences. It is an assemblage, a set of heterogeneous elements that are related to one another and, through these relationships, produce properties that do not necessarily belong to each element

individually.[4] Thinking about craft in this way requires cartographies sensitive to other ways of seeing and understanding inhabited space.[5]

All of this implies re-examining the categories through which craft has been studied, classified, and interpreted. The tendency to reduce it to a heritage object or tourist attraction, to an artefact, fetish, or consumer item, tends to isolate it from the conditions that sustain it and to sever it from the way of life that produces it.[6] The heritage machine produces value chains and utilitarian meanings that rearticulate practices apart from the social, material and ecological interdependencies that sustain them.[7] However, craft is neither a remnant of the past nor an ornamental exteriority of modernity. Rather, it constitutes a form of practical intelligence through which people engage with, respond to and transform their environments.[8] This understanding challenges forms of modern abstraction that detach knowledge and production from the specific material conditions, ecological processes and social relations in which they take shape. Craft knowledge can therefore be understood as situated knowledge, in Haraway's sense,[9] because it emerges from embodied experience and specific relationships with the world, rather than from a supposedly universal or context-independent perspective. In some contexts, it also constitutes ancestral knowledge, as Krenak suggests,[10] insofar as practices and understandings are transmitted across generations and embedded in ongoing relationships with land, community and more-than-human life. In this sense, craft retains an epistemological dimension that often goes unnoticed when viewed solely through the lens of market criteria, authenticity, or cultural representation. Craft not only expresses a territory: it weaves it, makes it legible, and helps sustain it as a space for cohabitation. For example, basketry using locally available plant materials involves knowledge of seasonal cycles, the properties of raw materials, and the landscapes in which they grow, as well as examples of other materialities discussed in previous paragraphs.

This shift has significant theoretical implications. Drawing on Raven's,[11] understanding of artisanal knowledge and on the analysis of craft initiatives discussed in this study, craftwork can be understood not simply in terms of a finished product, but as a process of co-creation and world-building. Materials are not merely passive resources: their properties and constraints shape decisions, determine working rhythms, and open up different possibilities for making. Likewise, craft practices do not depend on individual skill alone, but draw on historically accumulated knowledge, specific ecological conditions, and technical cultures transmitted across generations. From this perspective, communities are not merely recipients of cultural goods, but active spaces in which practical knowledge is maintained, adapted, and reinvented through collective practice.

This perspective allows us to connect craft with deep-rooted and/or ancestral local knowledge without reducing it to an empty or merely celebratory category. Here, these forms of knowledge do not represent a romantic relic of the past, but rather forms of situated intelligence, historically developed in close relation to specific environments, communal ways of life, and particular ways of interpreting nature [12]. They are a mode of meaning-making grounded in experience, careful observation, intergenerational transmission, and a connection to the land. Within this framework, craft can be understood as one of the most visible expressions of

this knowledge, because it condenses a complex relationship between practice, memory and environment into the materiality of form.

The key point here is that this knowledge is not formulated from a distance, but from close proximity. It arises from living alongside a specific environment and from sustained attention to its variations. For this reason, craftwork points to a rationality distinct from modern abstraction. It does not operate on a blank slate, but within a world already inhabited by relationships, cycles and forces that the artisan learns to read, respect and transform. This reading is not merely instrumental. It implies an ethic of care, of correspondence, and of moderation. Craft entails recognising that the environment is not a mere repository of available materials, but a living fabric that demands reciprocity, one that does not involve unlimited extraction or the standardisation of meaning.

In the same vein, the territory can no longer be thought of as a mere stage on which cultural practices unfold. It is a process in the making. Artisanal knowledge does not pre-exist the relationship with the place; it is constituted within that relationship by establishing what Marilyn Strathern calls partial connections,[13] forms of linkage situated between materials, gestures, people, and local conditions, which relate heterogeneous elements without erasing their differences. Understanding this dynamic requires recognising that territories are not fixed entities, but are continually produced and transformed through relationships between people, materials, practices, and environments. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of territorialisation and deterritorialisation,[14] craft can be understood as a practice through which territorial relationships are established, maintained, and reconfigured in response to changing social and ecological conditions. From this perspective, the territoriality of artisanal knowledge does not imply an identity-based enclosure, but rather a concrete form of anchoring through which specific differences, rhythms, and material relationships are sustained and transformed. Abstract universalisation tends to erase these differences; the territorial perspective recovers them as a source of meaning. Craft, within this framework, is not a marginal pre-modern remnant, but an alternative form of intelligence through inhabitation.

This idea takes on particular significance when viewed against the backdrop of the contemporary ecological and cultural crisis. In a context marked by the acceleration of extraction, the homogenisation of ways of life, cultural struggles, and the commodification of local, craft practices emerge as spaces of resistance and persistence. This is not because they exist on the margins of the economy or global change, but because they can maintain a strong, non-utilitarian bond with the environment. Craft demonstrates that it is possible to produce without depleting, to transform without destroying, and to inhabit without expelling difference. This dimension is crucial for thinking about the present, because it points towards a different logic of relationship with territories: one based on accompaniment, adaptation, and continuity rather than control and extraction. Within this logic, technique does not simply act upon a passive environment; it develops through an ongoing interaction between people, materials, ecological conditions, and inherited knowledge. It is in this sense that craft can be understood as sympoietic, following Donna Haraway's use of the term to describe processes of "making-with": forms of

collective becoming in which entities do not produce themselves independently, but emerge through their relations with other beings, materials, and environments.[15] Craft practices, understood in these terms, are not merely techniques for transforming resources; they are situated practices through which people and environments continuously shape one another.

From this perspective, the relationship between craft and tourism must be approached critically and with caution. Tourism often incorporates craft as an attraction, as a sign of authenticity, or as a means of distinguishing a region. However, such incorporation can strip craft of its historical depth if it is separated from the material and community-based conditions of its production. When craft practices are detached from the contexts and actors that give them meaning, a process of folklorisation occurs that transforms craft into a staged spectacle, liable to be consumed as an image rather than experienced as a cultural practice; a process that disrupts the relationships between the tangible and intangible values that underpin it.[16] For this reason, the relationship between craft and tourism can only be fruitfully conceived if tourism is redefined as a practice of responsible engagement with the local area and not as a mere extraction of experiences.[17]

This calls for a shift in perspective regarding the very notion of tourist attraction and value. Craftwork can be understood not simply as a decorative element within a cultural offering, but as a means of accessing and interpreting dimensions of local life. When reduced to a consumer object, however, its relational dimension risks becoming obscured: the network of relationships connecting materials, memory, knowledge, and community becomes less visible. From this perspective, sustainable tourism can be understood as an approach that attends to these relationships rather than treating them as interchangeable elements of a tourist product. Such an approach shifts attention away from the picturesque or the exotic and towards the forms of knowledge and social relations sustained through the continuity of living practices. Craft therefore provides a useful analytical lens through which to examine how relationships between visitors and territories are constructed, particularly when tourism engages with the practices, knowledge, and material processes through which communities continually reproduce and transform their environments.[18]

These issues have direct political and ethical implications, as they concern how the knowledge and work of communities that sustain practices rooted in the territory are recognised and valued in the face of processes of dispossession, marginalisation, and commodification. In the context of rural tourism, this requires examining who defines the value of local crafts, whose knowledge is made visible, and who benefits from their transformation into cultural or economic resources.

Ultimately, the argument put forward here is that craft allows us to map out alternative ways of living. Its theoretical significance lies in the fact that it brings to light a mode of existence that does not separate technique from life, object from process, or culture from territory. To conceive of it in this way implies recognising that there are forms of knowledge that are not exhausted by their conceptual formulation, because they live on in practice, in transmission, and in their relationship with the environment. Craft is one such form of knowledge: an

embodied, territorial and sensitive epistemology. Consequently, its analysis opens up a field of reflection that connects local and/or ancestral knowledge, forms of cohabitation, and sustainable tourism, without reducing any of these terms to their most instrumental use. What is at stake is not merely the preservation of a tradition, but the possibility of imagining and sustaining more liveable territories.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the analysis that follows establishes an operational framework for identifying good craft practices that embody these interconnections between territory, situated knowledge and sustainable tourism. Key concepts such as 'good practice', 'remote rural area' and 'sustainability' are first defined, alongside seven operational variables: tangible and intangible heritage values, innovation, social/economic/environmental sustainability, social appropriation of heritage, the positive impact of rural tourism and replicability. These enable the systematic global search for exemplary experiences. Building on this methodological framework, the results of the mapping exercise are presented, along with specific case studies illustrating how craft, understood as a territorial epistemology, generates viable models of rural development that respect their conditions of possibility.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was structured in three main phases, moving from the definition of the conceptual and analytical framework to data collection and the classification and selection of cases for subsequent analysis. First, the key concepts guiding the research were defined, including good practice, rural area, rural remote area, and sustainability. Second, a set of variables and indicators was established to provide a consistent framework for identifying and analysing the characteristics of the initiatives, together with a series of cross-cutting ethical considerations. Third, these criteria were translated into a specific data collection template, which was used by the project partners to identify, document and classify examples of good practices. The collected material was subsequently organised according to geographical, territorial and organisational dimensions, providing the empirical basis for the comparative analysis developed in the following sections.

Definition of key concepts: good practice, rural area, rural remote area and sustainability

Within the framework of the inventory carried out, initiatives aimed at the recovery, enhancement and revitalisation of local cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, have been identified as good practices. They are characterised by the integration of innovative processes in the creation of new products, services or activities, whether at an organisational level or in their methodologies of implementation. Likewise, actions that contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the rural areas in which they are carried out have been identified as good practices. In this regard, particular emphasis has been placed on their capacity to foster social ownership of cultural heritage by local communities, as well as their positive impact on tourism, understood as a driving force for sustainable rural development. In this process, particular importance has been attached to local initiatives that promote the creation and/or strengthening

of territorial ecosystems through the coordination of public and private actors, rather than individual or isolated projects.

In line with the project's overall objectives, the identification and selection of initiatives was based on a set of keywords that guided the analysis, including: craft, intangible heritage, tradition, innovation, design, local area, rural character, sustainability and tourism in remote rural areas.

The concepts of 'rural area' and 'remote rural area' were addressed and debated by the entities participating in this project task, given their varying definitions and implications across different geographical contexts. What constitutes a rural or remote rural area varies depending on the country, region, and institutional framework applied. In some cases, the classification is based on criteria such as population density and access to basic services, while in others, calculations of distances or travel times to urban centres are what identify them as remote.[19]

Thus, a rural area is defined as a geographic region characterised by low population density, a predominance of agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities, and limited infrastructure and public services compared to urban areas.[20] Remote rural areas constitute a specific subset of rural territories, characterised by their spatial isolation and cumulative difficulties in accessing essential services and market opportunities. Their distance from major urban centres often results in persistent challenges related to transportation connectivity, service provision, and socioeconomic development in general. The European Union applies classification criteria based on indicators such as population density (inhabitants *per* km²) and distance to urban centres to distinguish between intermediate rural areas and remote rural areas. The latter are typically defined as those in which communities are located at a considerable distance from urban centres, limiting access to essential infrastructure and public services. This relative isolation can have a direct impact on socioeconomic development and the overall quality of life of the population.[21]

These variations in terminology and classification were taken into account to ensure a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach throughout the entire process. Given the broad geographical area considered for project identification, there are cases where the distance between a rural area and the nearest city is considerable, yet the territory is well-connected thanks to efficient transportation infrastructure. Conversely, there are also situations where the distance to an urban centre is relatively short, but geographical features, such as mountainous terrain, contribute to a high degree of isolation.

Furthermore, the diversity of geographic contexts and social realities makes it particularly difficult to establish a single, universally applicable definition of 'rurality'. Defining what constitutes a rural area in a Global North country is not the same as doing so in the Global South. Even within the Global North, there may be substantial differences between rural regions, depending on their socioeconomic, cultural and environmental characteristics.

For this reason, a broader and more flexible definition of rural areas was adopted for the inventory. For the purposes of this research, rural areas are understood as territories characterised by relatively low population density, a

predominantly rural economic and social structure, and a degree of limited access to urban centres, services and infrastructure. This approach is informed by the fundamental criteria established by the European Union while allowing for the inclusion of diverse territorial contexts.

In addressing sustainability in this research, the variables and indicators considered spanned three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. These constitute its essential and interdependent pillars, as a truly sustainable society cannot be achieved without safeguarding the fundamental elements of each. As Duxbury and Gillette point out,[22] the role of culture in sustainability has been approached through different conceptualisations and models, including those that situate it within the social dimension and those that propose considering it as a distinct dimension or as a fourth pillar.[23] This debate remains open and reflects the fact that the role of culture in sustainable development is still a conceptual framework under construction.[24] In this inventory, we have opted to integrate culture primarily within the social dimension, given that the practices analysed are closely related to community participation, social cohesion, cultural identity and intergenerational transmission. This does not imply overlooking the interconnections between culture and the economic and environmental dimensions, but rather reflects a methodological decision consistent with the scope and characteristics of the selected entities.

In addition, particular emphasis was placed on what is commonly referred to as social sustainability, with a specific focus on the perspective developed by sociological and anthropological studies of tourism. These fields have highlighted the importance of monitoring the social impacts of tourism as a central component of its sustainability.[25]

In 2023, the International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO) placed social sustainability at the centre of its agenda, positioning it as a key pillar alongside economic and environmental dimensions. This decision was a response to the persistent marginalisation of the social dimension in the discourse on tourism sustainability. In this regard, issues such as participatory governance and respect for local communities are of critical importance when assessing whether tourism is having a truly positive impact. This involves recognising as best practices those projects and initiatives that generate direct benefits for people, local communities, and regions, such as solidarity-based, responsible, and community-based tourism. These forms of tourism not only promote a more equitable distribution of economic benefits but also foster the creation of positive and enriching relationships between tourists and host communities, based on respect, participation, and cultural exchange.[26]

Likewise, the labour rights of those involved in tourism projects and initiatives represent a fundamental dimension of social sustainability. In this regard, a best practice must guarantee decent working conditions and fair wages for all those involved in the development and implementation of such initiatives. Promoting labour justice and protecting workers is not only an ethical obligation but also a key component in moving toward a truly sustainable and equitable model of tourism.[27]

A fundamental requirement for the tourism sector is to adopt the principles of sustainable tourism and focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Sustainable tourism should not be viewed as a separate component of tourism, nor as a set of niche products, but rather as a defining characteristic of the tourism sector as a whole, which must strive to become increasingly sustainable. UN Tourism defines sustainable tourism as 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities'.[28]

Variables, indicators and cross-cutting ethical considerations

The involvement of multiple partners in compiling projects and initiatives made it necessary to develop a standardised data collection form with clearly defined fields, enabling information to be gathered consistently and subsequently organised and analysed effectively.

Within this process, it was essential to incorporate qualitative evaluation criteria, which serve as guidelines for assessing the non-quantifiable aspects of a project or activity. The focus is on subjective, narrative, or descriptive dimensions that cannot be directly measured numerically but provide key information about the quality, relevance, or suitability of what is being evaluated. Therefore, having well-defined variables and indicators was a key aspect of this research process. These components established clear parameters for data collection, helped structure the information, and facilitated the analysis.

The variables and indicators presented below (**Figs. 1-2**) were designed with a flexible approach; rather than imposing rigid or definitive categories, their objective was to provide a starting point for understanding the characteristics of the different types of initiatives identified in each region. The evaluation of best practices using this set of criteria served as a valuable tool for addressing the diversity and complexity of the subject under study. Another relevant aspect highlighted for the qualitative analysis was the incorporation of ethical considerations; that is, principles or criteria that help determine whether the initiatives operate fairly and respectfully, safeguarding the rights and dignity of the individuals and communities involved. The definition of these variables, indicators and ethical considerations is based on various reference sources.[29]

When identifying and selecting good practices, fundamental ethical aspects that cut across all the variables analysed were also taken into account. First, respect for and protection of intellectual property and local knowledge, including expertise in design, production processes, sourcing and processing of materials, as well as traditional techniques. This entails preventing plagiarism, cultural appropriation, and any form of undue exploitation of this knowledge. Another ethical aspect considered was the strengthening of artisans' autonomy and their capacity to decide on their own development, in order to avoid the imposition of external models that do not meet their needs or fit their contexts. Likewise, among the other values included, we emphasise the balance between innovation and the preservation of traditional practices, striving not to compromise cultural identity or replace local production systems with an exclusively profit-driven capitalist

logic. In this vein, a critical perspective was incorporated to avoid the romanticisation of phenomena such as tourism, anticipating and mitigating potential negative impacts such as gentrification, rising living costs, pollution, or the alteration of cultural practices.

The fair distribution of economic, social, and cultural benefits among stakeholders was also considered, with the aim of preventing inequalities or concentrations of value. Similarly, cultural sensitivity was considered a key aspect, understood as the need to avoid the commodification or distortion of traditional practices, as well as to respect local ways of understanding development and well-being. This implies adapting the activities carried out by the initiatives to the local context, challenging the imposition of urban models or external visions of development.

Variable/Description	Indicators
Tangible Heritage	
Material remains associated with the historical-cultural legacy	* Handicraft production tools * Raw materials and other materials used * Workspaces * The resulting handicraft products
Intangible Heritage	
Non-material values	* The values and ontological significance of the artisan's tools * The cultural and creative traditions underlying the sourcing of materials and the production process * The epistemological frameworks of artisans
Innovation	
A holistic process that combines science, public participation and community management to promote sustainable rural development. It involves innovative approaches to organisation, processes and outputs.	* Co-creation and collective collaboration: activities which, through collaboration, utilise various elements to promote processes of co-creating social and economic value, creating spaces for the exploration and exchange of * knowledge. * Partnerships, formal agreements and formal solidarity initiatives in which entities from outside the local community act as facilitators to encourage the creation of new products. * Creation of new artisanal products in which tradition is interwoven with new techniques, materials or forms. * Innovation through resilience and adaptation (climate change, migration, population decline, gentrification or mass tourism).
Sustainability	
A holistic approach that takes into account the environmental, social and economic impacts of the initiative or project, as well as its ability to stand the test of time and deliver sustained positive outcomes for the local area and its residents.	* Social sustainability: promotes equity (e.g. gender), inclusion (generational, ethnic, economic, etc.), respect for human rights and community participation. Cultural relevance of the project within the local area where it is implemented. * Environmental sustainability: measures the impact of craft practices on the environment, including the use of sustainable materials, waste management practices and the carbon footprint of production processes. It also considers the projects' contribution to the conservation and protection of the environment, for example, through the use of natural materials or non-polluting production processes. * Economic sustainability: generates financial benefits for project members and also for other people in the area where it is located. Economic indicators should not be reduced solely to monetary issues; it is necessary to include alternative economic systems, formal solidarity, interdependence, the exchange of goods, the exchange of services, payments in kind, workspaces donated to the community by municipal institutions, etc. (see, for example, research on diverse economies from the Community Economies Research Network).

Variable/Description	Indicators
Social appropriation of cultural heritage	
A process through which local communities and organisations actively engage in the preservation, promotion, interpretation and use of tangible and intangible cultural heritage that forms part of their history, customs and environment. It involves viewing cultural heritage not only as an integral part of identity, but also as a dynamic and evolving element that contributes to the well-being and quality of life of the communities in which it is found.	Initiatives to revitalise cultural and recreational traditions linked to heritage. Initiatives that help to promote traditional knowledge and practices. Initiatives involving the active participation of local communities in decision-making regarding the use and management of their cultural heritage.
The positive impact of sustainable tourism on rural areas	
The benefits that this form of tourism brings to local communities and how it can serve as a key tool for improving their quality of life, whilst ensuring the preservation of their environment and heritage.	* Job creation: creating jobs in tourism-related sectors, such as the hospitality industry, guided tours, and the sale of handicrafts. * Economic diversification: introduction of new sources of income beyond agriculture, such as ecotourism and cultural tourism. * Infrastructure improvements: modernisation of roads, communication networks and basic services to support tourism and benefit local residents. * Expansion of public services: improvements in healthcare, education and recreational facilities thanks to revenue generated by tourism. * Heritage preservation and revitalisation of traditions: funding for the conservation of historic sites and the promotion of local traditions. * Strengthening of local identity: fostering community pride through cultural exchanges and showcasing local heritage to visitors.
Replicability	
The ability of a project or initiative to be replicated in other contexts, locations or situations, whilst maintaining its effectiveness, success and sustainability.	* Documentation by entities on the creation and development of the project. Publications, reports, videos and social media are used as documentation tools, alongside case studies. * The production of manuals or guides to standardise the process, or has designed training workshops and similar initiatives. * Regular evaluations to demonstrate the project's viability. * Sufficient flexibility to adapt to different cultural and geographical contexts.

Figs. 1 & 2: Tables of Variables and Indicators for the Selection of Projects or Initiatives for the Good Practices Inventory.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

Data collection, case selection and classification

After defining the aspects described above and designing a specific template for data collection, the research process was conducted in a participatory manner between January and May 2025. The work was distributed geographically among the various project partners (see section 1), who were responsible for identifying examples of good practices and completing the corresponding summary form.

Although the research focused primarily on European cases, examples from other continents were also considered where relevant, in order to broaden the sample and provide a wider comparative perspective. The data collection template gathered information on the name and location of each initiative, the entities or individuals involved, and the characteristics of the case in relation to the variables and indicators established in the research framework. A combination of data

collection techniques was employed, including on-site visits to the projects, literature reviews, consultations with local and national institutions linked to the craft sector, telephone and email consultations, and online meetings with project members. In some cases, project partners had participated directly in the initiatives analysed, providing first-hand knowledge and allowing for a deeper understanding of the experiences.

Once the cases had been collected, a classification process was undertaken. This proved complex due to the considerable diversity of the selected initiatives. The cases were implemented in both rural and urban settings and were promoted by a wide range of actors, including local communities, public administrations, universities, cultural organisations, NGOs and private enterprises. They also addressed diverse areas, including craft heritage associated with different materials and techniques, music, tourism, education and the transmission of knowledge, and took multiple forms, such as festivals, guided tours, craft centres, periodic gatherings of artisans and digital platforms.

To organise this diversity, the initiatives were initially classified according to two complementary dimensions: geographical scope and relationship with territory. Geographically, the cases were grouped by continent, Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and Oceania, and subsequently organised by country. A specific category was also established for transnational projects spanning more than one country or region. In terms of their relationship with territory, the initiatives were subsequently examined according to whether they were developed in rural areas, had a significant impact on rural areas, or were primarily situated in urban contexts.

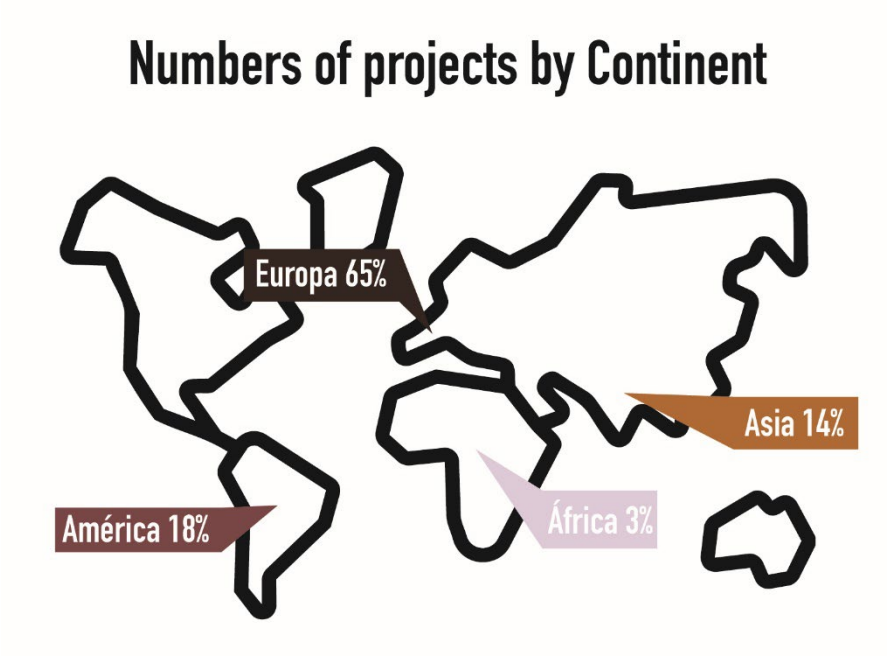


Fig. 3: Number of Projects Selected by Continent.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

A total of 62 initiatives were identified, with European initiatives, and particularly those developed in the project's partner countries, constituting the largest group (**Fig. 3**). Based on their relationship with rural areas, the initiatives were classified into four main categories, whose relative proportions are shown in **Fig. 4**. The first comprised projects and initiatives developed in rural areas, specifically designed and implemented in rural settings, where factors such as lower population density, limited infrastructure and proximity to the natural environment shape local needs and opportunities. The second included projects and initiatives with an impact on rural areas, referring to programmes that, although not physically based in rural settings, have significant effects on rural communities, including public policies, educational programmes and technological solutions. The third category comprised urban initiatives related to crafts, including programmes, policies and projects developed in urban contexts to support, promote and integrate traditional and contemporary craft practices. Finally, four cases were classified as cultural craft traditions, as they corresponded to specific cultural traditions that did not fit within the project-based categories and were therefore considered separately.

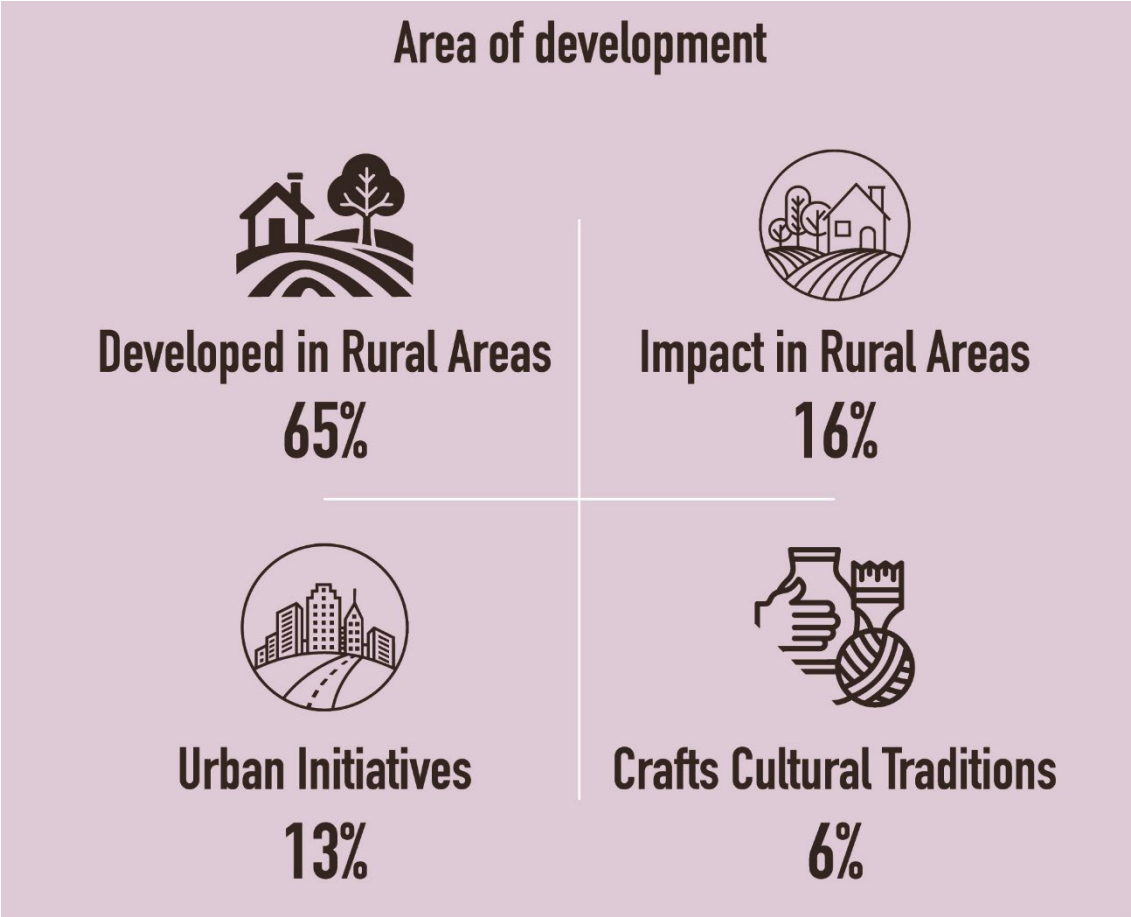


Fig. 4: Development Areas and Percentages of Projects and Initiatives Selected for the Good Practices Inventory. Source: Author's own elaboration.

Following this initial classification, a second phase of analysis focused specifically on projects developed exclusively in rural areas or with a significant impact on them. The aim was to produce more detailed analytical tables capturing key characteristics of the initiatives, including the type of promoter, areas of activity, craft elements involved, and their continuity and sustainability over time. This enabled a more detailed examination of how the initiatives operate within their specific territorial contexts and of their capacity to maintain their activities and generate longer-term impacts. Alongside the territorial classification, the initiatives were also grouped according to the type of organisation or collaborative structure involved. Craft cooperatives or associations comprise organisations jointly owned and managed by their members, who share responsibilities and, where applicable, profits, as well as groups of individual artisans established to collaborate, promote their crafts, exchange knowledge and defend their shared interests. Social enterprises in the craft sector are organisations whose primary aim is to generate social impact, for example by preserving craft traditions, supporting craft communities or promoting fair trade, while maintaining financial sustainability through the sale of handmade products. Craft enterprises are organisations dedicated to the production, promotion and/or sale of handcrafted products, often drawing on traditional techniques and local materials and collaborating with craft communities. In the contexts examined, they may also contribute to sustainable tourism by connecting craft production with local cultural and territorial resources. Institutional collaborative projects refer to initiatives in which two or more institutions, including universities, cultural organisations, NGOs, public bodies or private-sector entities, work together towards shared objectives, usually through formal agreements or partnerships and by pooling resources, knowledge and expertise. Finally, other collaborative community projects encompass initiatives developed through partnerships among diverse local organisations, including businesses, associations and cooperatives, which collectively contribute to local development and the maintenance or valorisation of craft and cultural resources.

These two complementary classifications, according to territorial relationship and organisational structure, provided an initial framework for organising the empirical material. They also made it possible to identify common patterns across the cases and to establish a more focused sample of initiatives for the subsequent comparative analysis.

FROM RELATIONAL PRACTICES TO TRANSFERABLE PRINCIPLES

Drawing on Inventory of Good Practices,[30] this section examines six initiatives through the conceptual framework developed above. Rather than treating these initiatives as exemplary models to be replicated, the analysis explores how the relationships between craft, territory and community are organised in different contexts, and how they contribute to sustaining and transforming local knowledge. Five analytical dimensions guide the discussion: first, the relational connections between craft, territory and community; second, the assemblages and partial connections through which actors, knowledge and

resources interact; third, the collective processes through which knowledge is shared, transmitted and transformed, and through which care and new capacities emerge; fourth, the role of visits to craft workshops as spaces of experiential learning, where visitors engage with materials, techniques and situated knowledge, gaining insight into the relationships between artisanal production, community life and territorial conditions; and fifth, the conditions under which the principles underlying these practices may inform initiatives in other contexts. The purpose is not to establish a hierarchy of good practices, but to examine what these cases reveal about the relationships that enable craft traditions to remain meaningful and viable within changing rural territories.

Craft, territory and community

The initiatives examined in this section illustrate different ways of integrating craft into rural development. Their approaches vary according to whether they focus on a specific production chain or connect craft with a wider range of territorial activities.

The Linen Project in the Netherlands,[31] focuses on reactivating local flax cultivation and linen production. Initiated by Crafts Council Nederland in 2018, it brings together farmers, craftspeople, designers, researchers and educational institutions across the production process, from cultivation to textile design. Its learning-by-doing approach supports practical collaboration and the exchange of knowledge, while the development of contemporary applications for linen seeks to reconnect traditional skills with current production and design practices.

Territori de Masies, a non-profit rural cooperative in Baix Solsonès, Catalonia, Spain,[32] adopts a broader territorial approach. Bringing together residents, associations and businesses, it promotes local heritage, responsible tourism, agriculture, craft production and environmental stewardship. Craft is one component of this wider network, alongside activities such as gastronomy, accommodation and cultural initiatives. Rather than concentrating on the development of a single craft sector, the cooperative seeks to strengthen the local economy through collaboration among different actors and activities.

The contrast between these initiatives lies in their different points of entry: The Linen Project organises collaboration around the revival of a specific material and production chain, whereas *Territori de Masies* coordinates a wider range of activities at territorial level. Both offer examples of how craft can contribute to rural development, although through different organisational models. This distinction provides a useful basis for comparing them with initiatives that place greater emphasis on artisan livelihoods, intergenerational learning or visitor participation.

Assemblages and partial connections

The cases allow us to examine how heterogeneous elements become connected without being fully integrated into a single system. Their coherence does not derive from homogeneity, but from selective and situated relationships between actors, forms of knowledge, materials and environmental conditions that retain a degree of autonomy. The concept of partial connections is particularly

useful for understanding how these relationships enable collaboration and change without erasing the differences between the elements involved.

The Linen Project provides a particularly useful example of this process. Its reactivation of local linen production brings together agriculture, craft, design and research around the cultivation, transformation and use of flax. These actors retain their specific roles while developing new possibilities through collaboration. For instance, the relationship between farming and craft connects agricultural production with textile processing, but does not make agricultural and artisanal knowledge interchangeable. Farmers contribute knowledge of cultivation, while craftspeople and designers work with the properties and possibilities of the resulting material.[33] Their connection is partial because collaboration takes place around specific stages of the production chain, without requiring all participants to share the same expertise or objectives.

Burel Factory, a Portuguese initiative dedicated to the revival of traditional wool production in the Serra da Estrela region,[34] illustrates a different configuration. Traditional wool-working techniques and historic machinery are brought into dialogue with contemporary design and scientific research, including work on materials and natural dyes. These elements originate in different historical and institutional contexts, yet their combination creates new possibilities for craft production. The connection between inherited techniques and contemporary design, for example, allows traditional wool-working to inform new products without requiring the latter to reproduce historical forms. Similarly, research into natural dyes creates opportunities to reconsider material processes through scientific investigation. These connections remain partial because traditional craft, design and research contribute different forms of knowledge rather than merging into a single practice.

Lotus Silk Farm in Cambodia, adds a material and environmental dimension to this analysis.[35] The initiative produces textiles from lotus fibres using traditional techniques, while lotus cultivation complements rice farming and contributes to the diversification of local livelihoods. The extraction and processing of the fibres connect artisanal work with the properties and availability of the plant, as well as with the temporal demands of its transformation. The relationship between cultivation and textile production is partial because these remain distinct practices, even as each shapes the possibilities of the other. The plant is not simply a resource external to craft: its material properties and the conditions of its cultivation participate in shaping the production process. This case therefore extends the concept of assemblage beyond relations between human actors to include interactions between artisanal knowledge, plant materials and environmental processes.

Territori de Masies extends this perspective to the territorial scale. Rather than being organised around a particular material or production chain, the initiative connects agriculture, tourism, cultural heritage, gastronomy and craft through cooperative structures and shared projects. A partial connection can be observed in the way craft production participates in a broader network promoting local products, cultural activities and responsible tourism without becoming the cooperative's sole focus. An artisan, an agricultural producer and a tourism

initiative may contribute to shared territorial objectives while maintaining different activities, priorities and organisational structures.[36] Their collaboration does not depend on becoming a single enterprise or adopting an identical understanding of the territory; it depends on the specific opportunities for cooperation created through the network.

Taken together, the cases reveal different configurations of partial connection. The Linen Project connects agricultural and artisanal knowledge through a shared production chain; Burel Factory brings inherited techniques into contact with contemporary design and research; Lotus Silk Farm links textile production with plant materials and agricultural conditions; and *Territori de Masies* coordinates distinct activities within a territorial framework. In each case, the connection creates possibilities that would be more difficult to achieve independently, while the elements involved retain their specific characteristics. Assemblages are therefore better understood as evolving configurations in which human and non-human elements interact without losing their differences.

This perspective also helps explain how craft practices adapt over time. Their continuity depends not simply on preserving existing techniques or organisational arrangements, but on establishing new connections in response to changing social, economic, material and environmental conditions. The following section examines how these connections can support collective knowledge, cooperation and care.

Collective knowledge, intergenerational transmission and care

If the notion of assemblage helps to understand how heterogeneous elements become connected, the concept of sympoiesis (see Section 2) allows us to examine what is produced through these relationships. The cases analysed suggest that the value of good practices lies not only in the connections they establish, but also in their capacity to generate forms of co-creation, shared knowledge and care that cannot be attributed to a single actor.

The Anou Cooperative in Morocco,[37] offers a particularly clear example of how craft production can support collective organisation and community development. Bringing together more than 600 artisans from cooperatives, associations and workshops, the initiative is managed and led by the artisan community itself. Most of the artisans are women who produce handmade rugs using traditional techniques, creating a range of styles and weaving methods. Each piece is unique, and artisans set their own prices, establishing a direct relationship between their work and its economic value rather than relying on conventional resale and bargaining practices.

The cooperative combines this artisan-led model with mechanisms for collective empowerment, including the reinvestment of part of its profits in training, employment creation and community development.[38] Its relationship with Atlas Wool Supply Co.[39] further extends this approach to the supply of raw materials. This company provides yarn to Anou artisans at cost and seeks to direct the benefits of its activities towards shepherds, grazing landscapes and artisans across the network. The use of traceable natural wool and, in some products, botanically dyed yarns also connect textile production with the people and

resources involved in obtaining and processing materials. These arrangements link production practices to wider questions of rural economic development, material sourcing and the distribution of economic value.

This relationship also provides a basis for understanding care as a collective practice. Training, employment creation and the reinvestment of resources in the community contribute to improving the economic well-being of people living in remote rural areas, while also supporting the capacities and well-being of the artisans who form part of the cooperative. Care thus operates at two interconnected levels: towards the wider rural communities whose economic opportunities depend on local resources, and towards the cooperative members themselves, whose knowledge, work and participation sustain the initiative. In this context, care extends beyond interpersonal relationships to encompass the social and economic conditions required for people to remain active, maintain their skills and continue living and working in their territories. The case suggests that the sustainability of a craft initiative depends not only on the quality or marketability of its products, but also on its capacity to support the people who sustain it and the communities in which it is embedded. What distinguishes The Anou Cooperative is its commitment to artisan-led development. Rather than positioning the community as the passive beneficiary of an externally designed intervention, the initiative enables artisans to shape their own economic activity through their involvement in production, decision-making and the distribution of benefits. This approach strengthens the continuity of craft practices while creating opportunities for artisans and contributing to the well-being of the wider rural community.

A different dimension of collective knowledge production and community development emerges in Le Ndomo, Mali.[40] The initiative works with *bogolan*, a traditional textile-dyeing technique in which cotton fabric is decorated using fermented mud to produce distinctive patterns and colours. This practice draws on traditional methods and materials while incorporating natural plant dyes, contemporary compositions and patterns. This combination allows inherited techniques to be adapted to contemporary textile design without abandoning their cultural and material foundations. The project brings together master craftspeople with young people, who are actively involved in learning and entrepreneurial processes. Beyond technical training, the project seeks to foster autonomy, creativity and opportunities for generating livelihoods. Its approach challenges the notion of heritage transmission as a unidirectional process in which older generations pass on established knowledge to younger recipients. Instead, the participation of young people creates opportunities to adapt and develop craft practices, linking their continuity to the capacity to respond to changing social and economic circumstances. In this context, care involves not only sustaining traditional skills but also creating meaningful opportunities for younger generations to engage with them and secure their livelihoods. Cultural continuity thus depends not on the unchanged preservation of techniques, but on ensuring that they remain relevant and viable for those who practise them.

Territori de Masies provides a third perspective by moving from the community of artisans or the intergenerational relationship between craftspeople

to the territorial scale. In this case, co-creation does not take place within a single community of practice, but emerges through the capacity of different actors to work together while maintaining their distinct organisational identities. This distinction is important for understanding sympoietic processes. Collective production does not necessarily require the creation of a single collective subject. Different organisations and initiatives can retain their autonomy while developing shared capacities through cooperation and co-creation. These capacities are distributed across the network, allowing activities such as local consumption, responsible tourism, cultural dissemination and the promotion of local products to become mutually reinforcing rather than operating as isolated interventions.

The three cases therefore reveal different forms of sympoietic production. In The Anou Cooperative, collective processes take shape through community governance and the redistribution of economic value. In Le Ndomo, they emerge through intergenerational learning and the joint production of continuity and new livelihoods. In Territori de Masies, they operate through territorial cooperation and the development of shared capacities among heterogeneous rural actors. These processes differ in scale and organisation, but they share an important characteristic: their outcomes cannot be fully attributed to a single actor.

Tourism through making: learning about and valuing craft practices

The relationship between craft and tourism varies across the initiatives analysed, depending on how visitors are invited to engage with the practices, materials and knowledge involved in textile production. Rather than treating tourism as a separate activity added to craft production, these cases allow us to examine how encounters with visitors can open up different ways of accessing local knowledge and the territories in which it is embedded. Their significance lies not simply in offering an activity, but in making visible aspects of craftwork that often remain hidden behind the finished product.

The Anou Cooperative and Le Ndomo offer ways of engaging with craft that combine direct contact with craftspeople and opportunities to learn about production processes. At The Anou Cooperative, workshop visits allow visitors to gain insight into the working conditions, skills and social relationships involved in craft production. In addition, learning residencies provide opportunities to develop this knowledge through more sustained engagement with craft practices. Le Ndomo, in turn, combines workshop visits, which allow visitors to observe production processes, with workshops and courses in natural dyeing, weaving and textile printing.

Lotus Silk Farm,[41] offers a different perspective by connecting textile production with the ecological processes on which it depends. The experience of carrying out or observing material transformations helps visitors recognise that textiles are not isolated objects, but the outcome of relationships between living organisms, environmental conditions, human skills and productive practices.

Burel Factory,[42] illustrates how traditional craft production can become part of a territorial tourism offer through the interpretation of industrial heritage and the continuation of local textile practices. Guided visits allow visitors to learn

about the production process, while the factory shop connects this experience with the purchase of locally produced textiles. Its inclusion in regional industrial heritage itineraries further links craft production to the interpretation of the area's cultural history and identity.

Taken together, these initiatives illustrate different ways in which tourism relates to craft practices, territorial relationships and community life. It is important to note that participation does not automatically foster an understanding of the knowledge and labour involved in craft production, just as increased visibility does not necessarily translate into recognition of its value. The interpretative dimension of these experiences depends on how they are designed, which forms of knowledge they convey, and whether craftspeople and local communities retain meaningful control over how their practices are presented. Ultimately, tourism, through observation, understanding and practical engagement, can contribute to this process when it creates opportunities to understand craft as a situated practice, rooted in ecological conditions, social relationships and forms of knowledge that cannot be separated from the contexts in which they develop.

From local practices to transferable principles: conditions for adaptation to other contexts

The comparative analysis of the selected practices raises a final question concerning their potential transferability. If good practices are embedded in specific territories, communities and historical trajectories, how can the knowledge generated through them contribute to initiatives developed elsewhere? The cases examined suggest that transferability cannot be understood as the direct replication of an existing practice. Rather, it involves identifying the principles and conditions that underpin a practice and adapting them to the social, cultural, economic and environmental characteristics of another context. This distinction is particularly relevant in the field of rural development, where territories differ considerably in terms of resources, institutional structures, demographic dynamics, forms of knowledge and economic opportunities. A practice that has emerged in response to a particular combination of these factors cannot simply be reproduced elsewhere without modification. The value of the cases analysed therefore lies less in providing ready-made models than in revealing different ways of organising relationships between local resources, knowledge, communities and economic activities.

The analysis points to several conditions that appear particularly relevant for such adaptation. The first is local embeddedness. The practices examined are not based on the introduction of an externally designed solution, but on resources, knowledge, needs and capacities that already exist, or can be developed, within the territory. This does not imply that external actors or knowledge are excluded. On the contrary, as the previous sections have shown, new possibilities can emerge through encounters between local and external forms of knowledge.

A second condition is relational capacity. The cases suggest that successful initiatives depend not only on the availability of cultural or material resources, but on the capacity to connect different actors around them. Farmers, craftspeople,

designers, researchers, public institutions, tourism initiatives, businesses and community organisations may have different interests and forms of expertise. What makes collaboration productive is not the elimination of these differences, but the creation of spaces, mechanisms and shared objectives through which they can interact. Transfer to another context therefore requires attention to the networks and forms of mediation that make such relationships possible.

A third condition concerns meaningful community participation and involvement in decision-making. Participation alone is insufficient if local actors remain recipients of decisions taken elsewhere. Effective participation involves the capacity to influence objectives, contribute knowledge, take part in decision-making and shape how benefits and resources are distributed. This is particularly important when cultural heritage becomes associated with tourism or new economic activities, since external demand can otherwise redefine local practices according to criteria that are disconnected from community priorities.

A fourth condition is adaptive capacity. The cases analysed demonstrate that continuity does not necessarily depend on preserving cultural practices in an unchanged form. On the contrary, their viability may depend on their ability to establish new relationships with contemporary design, technologies, markets, educational practices, environmental concerns and new generations. Adaptation therefore needs to be understood as part of continuity rather than as a departure from it. What is transferred to another context should consequently not be a fixed definition of what the practice must become, but an openness to experimentation and reinterpretation.

A fifth condition concerns care and reinvestment. The previous analysis showed that the sustainability of these initiatives depends on more than their capacity to generate economic returns. They also need to reproduce the social, cultural and material conditions that allow them to continue. Training, intergenerational knowledge transmission, community empowerment, the maintenance of local resources and the reinvestment of economic value can all contribute to this process. From this perspective, care is not an additional social dimension of a good practice, but one of the mechanisms through which its long-term viability is produced.

These conditions suggest that transferability operates at several levels. Some elements may be relatively easy to adapt, such as particular tools, methods of documentation, educational activities or mechanisms for networking. Others, such as governance structures, economic models or relationships between actors, require greater contextual adaptation. Finally, some elements may be inseparable from the historical and territorial conditions in which the practice emerged and therefore cannot be transferred directly. Recognising these different levels is essential if the notion of good practice is to avoid becoming a standardised model detached from the contexts in which it is applied.

The theoretical framework developed in the previous sections helps to clarify this distinction. From an assemblage perspective, practices are constituted by particular configurations of actors, materials, knowledge and institutions. These configurations cannot simply be reproduced because the elements available in another territory will inevitably be different. The notion of partial connections

further suggests that transfer does not require the recreation of the same network of relationships. Instead, new connections can be established between elements that occupy different positions in the new context. Finally, the concept of sympoiesis highlights the importance of co-producing new forms of knowledge, value and capacity rather than importing a finished solution.

This understanding also clarifies the meaning of replicability as a variable in the selection process. In this framework, replicability is not conceived as geographical duplication or as the direct reproduction of an existing practice in another territory. Rather, it refers to the potential of a practice to generate transferable knowledge, principles and ways of organising relationships that can be adapted to different social, cultural, economic and environmental contexts. Replicability therefore depends not on reproducing the same organisational structure or outcomes, but on the extent to which the underlying principles of a practice can inform new configurations elsewhere. In this sense, a good practice is considered replicable when it offers elements that can be learned from, reinterpreted and adapted by local actors according to the specific conditions of their own territory.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Building on the theoretical framework and comparative analysis developed above, we can return to the central question of this study: to what extent can craft, typically associated with inherited and/or territorialised practices, contribute to rural revitalisation? The findings suggest that its contribution does not stem from an intrinsic capacity to generate development, but from its role in connecting knowledge, materials, communities, economic activities and place-based resources in ways that sustain and transform rural life. The cases identified as good practices differ in their organisational models, scales of operation and economic strategies. Rather than following a common template, they demonstrate diverse ways of mobilising local resources, transmitting knowledge and organising community participation in productive activities. This supports the definition of good practice advanced in this article: an initiative should not be regarded as 'good' simply because it conforms to a predefined model or achieves a particular outcome, but because it sustains and renews the relationships on which its continuity depends.

The comparative analysis also clarifies the contribution of the theoretical concepts employed in this study, which together provide complementary perspectives for understanding how craft practices are sustained and transformed through the relationships between people, ways of making, materials and territory. The comparative analysis also clarifies the contribution of the theoretical concepts employed in this study, which provide complementary perspectives for understanding how craft practices are sustained and transformed through the relationships between people, ways of making, materials and territory. These perspectives move beyond an understanding of craft as an isolated cultural object or economic resource, drawing attention instead to the relational processes through which value, knowledge and possibilities for action emerge.

The analysis highlights the importance of understanding replicability not as the direct reproduction of an existing model, but as the adaptation of knowledge

and principles to different territorial contexts. Given the specific historical, social and environmental conditions of rural territories, the value of the inventory lies in identifying practices from which local actors can learn and develop their own responses. The study therefore understands good practice as a situated and relational process. Craft can contribute to rural revitalisation when it sustains knowledge, livelihoods and connections between generations, while remaining open to adaptation and new forms of cooperation.

NOTES

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