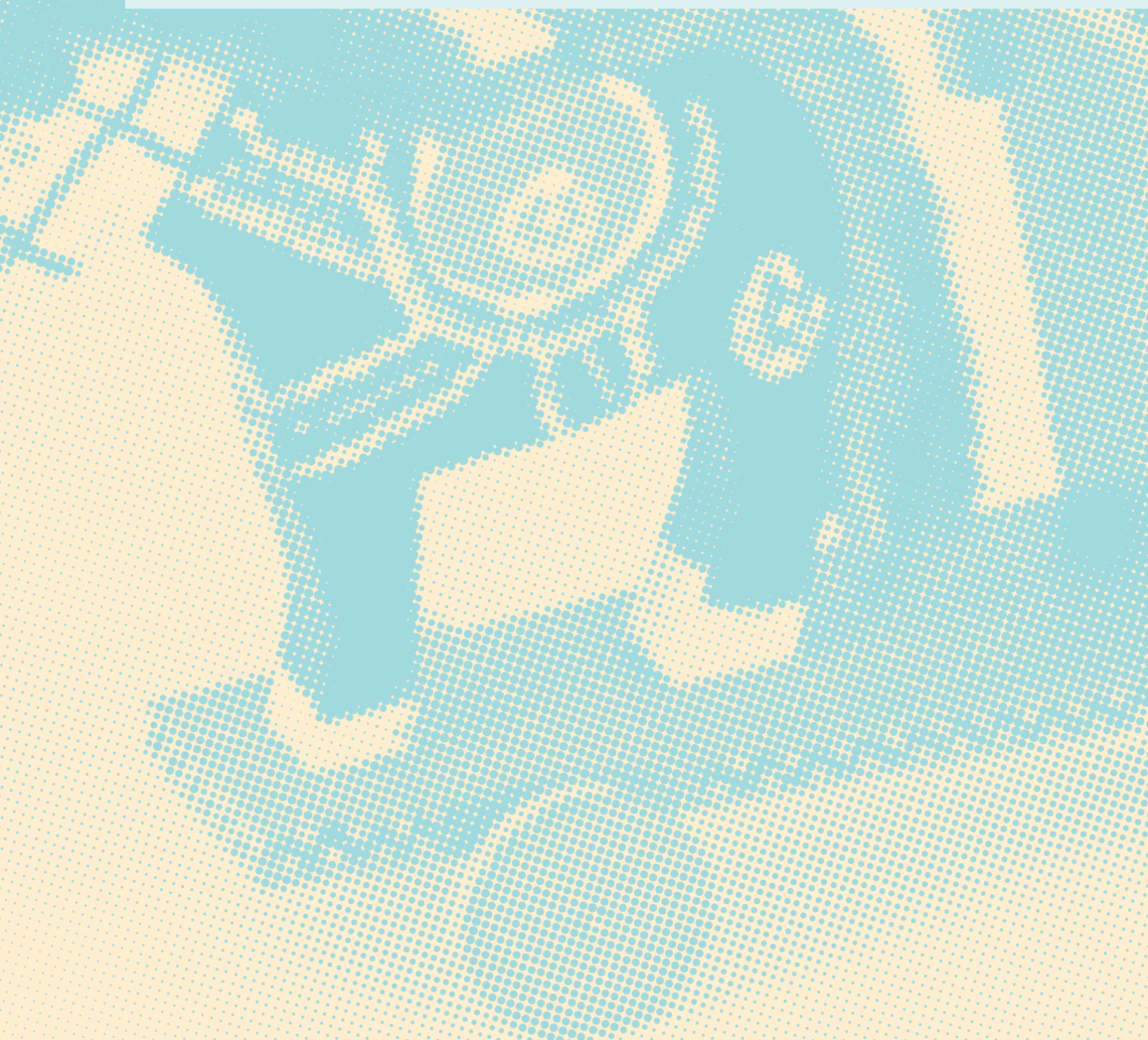


Traditional Crafts as a New Attraction for Cultural Tourism

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ABSTRACT

The project CRAFTATTRACT (Traditional crafts as a new attraction for cultural tourism) was implemented by the Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje and Slovenian partners in the cross-border area of Croatia and Slovenia. The Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje have considerable experience in exploring tangible and intangible heritage in the region and good experience of co-operation with traditional craftspeople, who are contracted on a regular basis to demonstrate their skills in the museums. The project CRAFTATTRACT joined together various experts in the border region of Croatia and Slovenia in order to foster heritage as a driving force for responsible tourist development, thus establishing a sound basis for the preservation of crafts. It was implemented with EU funding through the initiative INTERREG IIIA Neighbourhood Programme, Slovenia-Hungary-Croatia. After the project successfully completed all the envisaged activities and the EU support was terminated, the project continued to fulfil its mission. The museums continue to pursue the project's goals. The project also won international and national recognition. Furthermore, it played a significant role in the process of safeguarding intangible heritage in Croatia, especially in the preparation of the files for the national list of protected intangible heritage and for the inscription of the two elements from the region on the *Representative List* of UNESCO.

Keywords

craftspeople, traditional crafts, cultural tourism, cross-border cooperation, intangible heritage, sustainable development, attraction, cooperation, partner networks

Introduction

Where did the idea of CRAFTATTRACT come from?

One of the things that motivated museum professionals was the experience of museum staff working in the

Museum's 'Old Village' in Kumrovec, Croatia. It is an open air museum completely immersed in the real 'living' village without any boundaries between the two. Planned and built in the former Yugoslavia as the only open air museum in the country, considerable professional effort was invested in the concept and formation of the museum which was established in the native village of the late President Tito, who ruled the country for more than three decades.¹

It was a destination for many organised visits since the country's leader's birth place was a must-see for almost every organised excursion. After Croatia became independent the situation changed drastically and Kumrovec could not avoid the stigma of its past. However, in the 1990s the Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje were formed and took over the care of that extraordinary traditional asset, unique in preserving not only the original appearance of the village with vernacular architecture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but also the customs and everyday life of its inhabitants.

The museum has no boundaries. It is the centre of the living village with a population of about 200 people. The museum has had a long tradition of co-operating with craftspersons – not only in preparing exhibitions but

also in providing a space for demonstrating their work, buying their products for local souvenir shops and motivating them to continue the preservation of their workshops *in situ*. Valuable inputs by craftspersons were essential for drafting the project framework and for its implementation. On the other hand, museum experts have had considerable international experience. They have been active in ICOM's International Committee for Regional Museums and in the affiliated organisation – The European Association of Open-Air Museums. Our Slovenian partners, who we approached in order to make the application for cross border co-operation, had similar backgrounds.

The scope and vision

The project focused on the traditional heritage built on local uniqueness on the one hand and cultural tourism on the other. Croatia is a tourist country and earns significant income from annual visits², although the majority of tourists head for the extremely attractive coast during the summer months. There have been serious attempts in the country's developmental policy to lessen the impact of seasonal tourism and to enlarge the season by offering attractions inland. Among the measures taken I would like to stress the National



Figure 1
Mrs. Vera Hubicki, the gingerbread maker from Marija Bistrica, Croatia.
Photographic Library. Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje



Figure 2
Press conference in Zagreb at the Croatian Ministry of Culture in 2009, on the occasion of the inscription of seven intangible heritage elements on the ICH Representative List of UNESCO.
Photographic Library. Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje

Strategy for Cultural Tourism and the support for projects given by the Ministry of Tourism for the development of rural tourist areas focussing on traditional architecture, the renovation of old mills and farms, the refurbishment of local craft workshops and so on. The traditional heritage of Croatia is rich in regional diversity and certainly presents a significant potential, which was also emphasised in the National Strategy for Cultural Tourism.³ The region of Hrvatsko Zagorje has many similarities with the neighbouring Slovenian region, which is also trying to give impetus to tourism development. This common interest was a good start for building a strategic partnership.

Developing links between the culture and tourism sectors was a challenge, especially bearing in mind that traditional culture is more and more used as an attraction in tourism but not often in a way that heritage experts would approve. After the application and evaluation procedures were completed and we received the grant from EU, the project started to implement its activities. The first step was to conduct fieldwork in order to map potential in the region. As EU regulations are always very strict, the whole implementation period involved administration of the project, which we found a constant and a time-consuming task.

The mission was to approach the tourism sector in a way that would not only raise interest in rural culture in but also involve the professional help of heritage experts in optimising attractions for tourism in a sustainable way. Most surveys conducted by the tourism sector indicated that there had been a growing interest in 'authentic' traditional life, but it was strange that there were no programmes for tourists that offered such experiences. Existing 'traditional programmes' mainly offer accommodation and restaurants decorated in 'rural' style, quite often with a strange or non-existent combination of traditional elements whose origins could be partially traced to different communities and are partially invented. Therefore, the present state of affairs was seen as a challenge, and a vision highlighting new possibilities of coming closer to experiences with integrity seemed to be the right answer to the problem.

There has always been a complex relationship between tourism and culture in the region. In most cases the two sectors cohabit without interfering with each other, sometimes there have been minor conflicts but we noticed very few cases of good co-operation. So, our mission was to seek co-operation. The main concern was to see heritage, or to be precise, 'traditional' heritage, as an essential component of development in cultural

tourism in the region, which is close to urban centres.

The project team drafted the activities in a way that tackled the following vital aspects:

- Heritage (research, documentation and evaluation conducted by cultural institutions)
- Education (workshops and co-operation with schools)
- Media (creating partnerships with local press and radio stations)
- Conferences of experts (to bring the cultural and tourism sectors together in order to draft future strategies)
- Promotion of craftspersons and their products (fairs, exhibitions, marketing products)
- Co-operation with the tourism sector (addressing the main stakeholders in the field: agencies for using drafting itineraries, ministries and boards to elaborate various networks of subsidies and support for craftspersons)

The project was an accountable partnership, since its results were continuously monitored through a whole range of indicators during its implementation. Several

positive impacts were also measured after the end of the EU co-financing. The total value of the project was EUR 248,861.44, out of which the EU granted 74%.

Objectives

The main objective of the project was to offer a model for creating a common ground for cultural and tourism sectors from both sides of the border and to create synergies between traditional crafts and intangible heritage and the tourism sector. Such co-operation could then result in the creation of a common platform for capacity building and give an impetus to new attractions in the border region which could directly contribute to the development of the region.

Traditional crafts and all other forms of intangible heritage in Slovenia and Croatia represent a great resource for the development of cultural tourism. The border region is famous for its rich history and craft traditions, documented in numerous publications, reviews and exhibitions. However, more and more crafts and skills have been disappearing and potential opportunities for addressing Millennium Development



Figure 3
Exhibition opening at the new Centre for Traditional Crafts in Ptuj, Slovenia.
Photographic Library. Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje

Goals are not properly used. The project developed a model of safeguarding the diversity of human skills which should be promoted through usage. The whole process was supervised by different experts working in small teams.

The main objective of the project was followed by more specific goals such as:⁴

1. Creating a compatible database of traditional crafts and skills.

The database was planned in accordance with market needs at two designated locations, each with its own technological support, and managed by the newly established centres for traditional crafts and skills.

2. Building of new attractions in the border region.

The project was used to establish several new destinations in neighbouring villages introducing them as new tourist attractions.

3. Creating partner networks.

Networks included different interest groups, with special attention devoted to connecting groups which do not easily come into contact with each other and communicate (e.g. traditional craftspersons and vocational school students).

4. New programmes.

The project used local traditions as a starting point for new ideas and programmes which include traditional skills and knowledge in their development and thus contribute to their safeguarding.

Partnerships

Partners were the driving force of the project and we covered all fields of expertise. Leading partners were the Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje in Croatia, and the Scientific and Research Centre at Bistra Ptuj in Slovenia. The Croatian national partner was the Krapina-Zagorje County (local government) and there were three national



Figure 4
Mr. Vilko Kukec, a trough maker from the village of Selnica Gornja, Croatia
Photographic Library. Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje

partners in Slovenia: the Regional Museum of Murska Sobota, the City of Ptuj and the Regional Museum of Ptuj.

The complexity of the project required a careful selection of strategic partners who were able to follow a whole range of assigned activities and had the potential to perform the tasks agreed upon. All members of the team were experienced in their part of the work, ranging from mapping resources, conducting research related to traditional culture and intangible heritage, and the evaluation of cultural-tourist products. On the other hand, we have ensured the support of local authorities, which was of critical importance for the sustainability of the project.

The duration of the project was initially envisaged for eighteen months but as the evaluation process took longer than had been anticipated, we lost some time, and the implementation was limited to a period of fourteen months. Therefore, the commitment of the partners was crucial for success, as we were supposed to implement and co-ordinate activities in several regions of the cross-border area including the Krapina-Zagorje County in Croatia and Pomurje and Prekomurje in Slovenia.

Two target groups were included in the project: project participants and project beneficiaries. Project participants included traditional craftspersons that were chosen during the mapping phase. Not only registered craftspersons were included but also people who have certain traditional skills and practical knowledge similar to the crafts but not exactly having a defined legal status.⁵ A great number of project participants came from schools. We co-operated with vocational schools and they provided us with workshop participants. The participating teachers were a great help in delivering the educational programmes we prepared. Besides museum professionals and heritage experts we also included experts from the fields of cultural tourism and media.

At the beginning we saw different interest groups such as those who could benefit from the project results. Besides all the participants, we saw various cultural institutions as prime beneficiaries together with the tourist industry, including agencies, tour operators, spa centres, event managers and so on. However, some of the stakeholders in the tourism sector did not respond as we had hoped. As a result, they could not benefit from the project as planned. Local communities, depending on

the region and state, included either counties or municipalities and towns. They were very responsive during the implementation of the project and saw the new opportunities we offered. Benefits were also obvious to stakeholders coming from the economic sector, like chambers of craft or small and medium sized entrepreneurs. They all showed interest and offered their partnership support after the project was completed.

Traditional culture – frozen or alive?

What the project emphasised as a necessity was the need to understand traditional culture in a present-day context. Otherwise, all efforts to promote it or safeguard it could have been in vain. So, the aim was to build the links between culture, or more specifically heritage, and tourism in a more or less balanced relationship. However, this was difficult to achieve for many reasons. During the implementation process we encountered several obstacles to establishing constructive partnerships with the commercial tourism sector. We were aware that tourism and culture are very different in their approach to the common subject of development, so achieving a balance was extremely difficult. The heritage sector supported the idea that tourists should come to original places, to craftspersons and living human treasures who work in their natural environment. The minimum we expected was an interest in promoting special niche activities like organised tours to heritage institutions such as open air museums, traditional fairs or crafts people's workshops for those groups in the market who are looking for unique experiences.

It has to be admitted that the tourism side showed no real interest in offering such products for tourists or for more demanding audiences and enthusiasts. The project assumed that joint investment of both sectors in the development of rural tourism would be seen as a common advantage, but the tourism sector admitted that they prefer playing on safe ground, without investing in promoting of new products for special, small-scale audiences. Although tourist boards and the Ministry of Tourism joined the initiative and took part in our activities they are not the stakeholders who make programmes for the market. Crucial commercial partners, i.e. tourist agencies, remained rather indifferent.

In general, what they see as 'rural tourism' has no resemblance to the reality of our villages and

craftspersons' workshops. There is still no organised market niche for selling our well-known traditional sites – like the open air museum in Kumrovec. Of course, it has one of the highest visitor rates in the country due to individual visits and school excursions, but there is no regular organised selling of trips to the area by tourist agencies apart from those requested by individual customers. Even with special events like a traditional Zagorje Wedding or the Feast of St. George, there have been difficulties in advertising and offering them to tourists. Other traditional destinations are left to random visits by enthusiasts. One looks in vain for advertisements selling tours to traditional heritage areas offering experiences and contact with traditional craftspersons. On the other hand, the craftspersons are mainly elderly people and not very mobile. Few are ready to travel to distant fairs organised for special events, and what frequently happens is that middlemen appear instead, acting as 'original craftspersons'. Another negative impact is that they force down the prices of products made by traditional craftspersons, making their existence even more uncertain.

Project activities and results

A great added value of the project was the establishment of two centres which co-ordinated the work of the experts involved. One centre for traditional crafts and skills was opened in Kumrovec (Croatia) and the other in Ptuj (Slovenia). The co-operation started right from the beginning so the fieldwork and research were based on the same methodology which was developed for the purpose. The collected information was processed and stored in a database. The programme for the database was jointly created and in line with current museum practice. In that way compatibility was established, which could be very helpful in future projects. The centres were created within existing museums so their sustainability has been secured. Collected information was a good base for SWOT analysis of the development potentials of individual traditional crafts and skills in the cross-border region.

Among other outputs, a joint map of traditional crafts and skills in the cross-border region was successfully made, and together with a practical guide called the *Book of Masters*,⁶ offered several insights into the variety of traditional craftspersons in the region.

In Croatia we held five workshops organised with

regional vocational schools, and their implementation was demanding since the schools' curricula do not include activities in heritage institutions. However, the results were so inspiring that we are currently working to include some traditional crafts' activities in regular school programmes, and the initiative has been encouraged by the Ministry of Education. The workshops involved pottery, traditional decoration, blacksmithing, carpentry and making thatched roofs. The last workshop was also interesting for participants who are already employed in the building sector as this skill is in very short supply and there is a great need for that knowledge to be transferred among small entrepreneurs.

A good mode of promotion for craftspersons and their products was a series of exhibitions organised in five towns – two in Croatia and three in Slovenia – exhibiting products from the both sides of the border.⁷ This was also an opportunity to see differences and similarities. The project was also promoted at two fairs, one held in Croatia's capital, Zagreb, and the other in Ptuj in Slovenia. The joint website covered all aspects of the project and is still maintained to cover the follow-up activities.⁸

During the fieldwork the carriers and transmitters of intangible heritage and their work were photographed and filmed so the database is rich in visual material which is often used for new projects. A promotional DVD on traditional crafts was made in three languages.

One of the great outcomes of the project was the expert conference which gathered about eighty participants from the cross-border area. Professionals from the heritage and tourism sectors gave their contributions and the presentations were published in the conference proceedings. Several topics were considered of prime importance and were chosen for discussion at the round table. They can be divided into three groups: legal regulations, development opportunities and education.

Among legal issues a delicate question focussed on guarantees for traditional culture, as one of the most sensitive parts of heritage, to safeguard intangible heritage forms, especially bearing in mind the dangers when these are confronted with the negative impacts of tourism and its demands. Experts also noticed that the Ministry of Tourism of Croatia, for the past several years has strongly advocated the development of continental

tourism. They offered a range of measures and subsidies for traditional crafts in the wider market place, but local craftspersons need help in administering their own resources.

Some experts emphasised the necessity to explore models that would revive the development of an area as a whole. In order to encourage development, new partnerships should be established between craftspersons, heritage institutions, the tourism sector and local government. One of the main future roles of the new regional Centres for Traditional Crafts and Skills initiated by the CRAFTATTRACT project should be to help build such partnerships. Some new models and experiences from other countries were mentioned as examples of best-practice.⁹

The transfer of knowledge, which is the guarantee for the continuation of traditional crafts, was one of the key objectives of the project and therefore of great importance for the experts. Traditional craftspersons know how to make products but they do not know how to promote them and how to access the market. They need professional help, lest their products disappear in spite

of being inexpensive and of good quality. It is stressed that today, entrepreneurs running a business must have a whole range of knowledge, skills and competencies to successfully present and keep their product in the market. Traditional craftspersons should be trained to develop that capacity.

Visibility during the implementation

In conceiving the project special care was devoted to its visibility and the role of media. Therefore, the result was positive, although at the beginning the media were considered to be difficult stakeholders to deal with in the project. The project had foreseen public promotion and the involvement of the media, not only in organising press conferences and distributing regular announcements, but also in being an important agent for reaching special target groups. Traditional craftspersons and carriers of traditional skills are mainly older people who listen to local radio stations, so the participation of the media was vital in reaching them.

Project leaders regularly worked with newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations on both sides of the



Figure 5
Child's toy from the Zagorje region, Croatia.
Photographic Library. Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje

border and several TV shows and interviews were produced. The press-clippings of the project are impressive in their coverage and quantity. Another method also proved to be successful: organising events where traditional crafts were given a dominant role, as in living history events and traditional festivals. Several presentations of the project were organised in the cross-border area but also at international meetings. A well-designed logo and visual materials which were used by all partners in all the regions involved in the project increased the visibility and communicated messages in a direct way.

Monitoring the results

The implementation of the project was monitored on several levels and since the project was structured in working packages, according to the regulations, it was a helpful tool for periodic assessments.

The heritage level included research, keeping records and the storing and processing of information to be used later by different experts. Museum professionals found it the easiest part of the work although it took them some time to agree on the contents for developing an efficient data-base. The greatest benefit was seen after the project was completed.

The Ministry of Culture of Croatia nominated several elements for the UNESCO *Representative List of Intangible Heritage* and among them two were from the region of Hrvatsko Zagorje - traditional wooden toy making and gingerbread making.¹⁰ The information gathered by the project, especially the proposed models for transmitting knowledge and the preservation of crafts due to various initiatives were a significant help in preparing the nomination files. In September 2009 traditional wooden toy making was inscribed on the UNESCO *Representative list of Intangible Heritage* and in November 2010 the same result was accomplished with gingerbread making in Northern Croatia.

Monitoring the educational level implied the availability of information in the database for the purpose of creating educational programmes used for further education and for the transmission of knowledge through various types of practical classes. The project supported the transmission of knowledge and skills between craftspersons and students. The model was very

accessible and inclusive, open to institutions and individuals alike. It proved that it could be included in educational programmes, and several schools expressed interest. It expands slowly but the involvement of certain crafts in regular education is now in the process of being implemented in the vocational school in Oroslavje. The most endangered crafts, like toy making, may secure a future in that way.

However, another important task still remains a challenge. It is also necessary to educate traditional craftspersons to enable them to respond to the demands of the present-day market. Many opportunities offered to them by institutions stay unused as they do not have the capacity to deal with administration and the rather complicated paperwork. The centres could help them but they have to get used to constant communication. The project managed to establish good co-operation with some craftspersons but not all of them are responsive.

The issues and challenges with the tourism sector have already been mentioned, but it is necessary to stress that during the implementation of the project we managed to draft several culture-tourism itineraries that have been successful at a local level. But in general, this was the weakest part of the project as the private tourism domain is difficult to engage with and it has no interest in building destinations together with heritage institutions. Although the commercial tourist stakeholders want a new product, unfortunately they often prefer an easily accessible fake to 'the real thing'. We have also learned that there is a good reason why they take that approach, but exploring that issue would be a separate theme.

The marketing level incorporated strong promotion of the project through a range of activities, in order to sensitise the public and ensure support and interest for the project and what it could offer on the market. The project got good media support all the way through. Besides exhibitions, all partners took part in commercial fairs, which was also a good way to attract larger audiences.

The development level is visible through the benefits the project gave to local people. Those benefits include increased employment, the arrival of new visitors, offers of new products, and the introduction of new destinations. So far we have managed to create or give impetus to new offers to some destinations, thus fulfilling our aim to

develop attractions at micro locations. Several new workshops were started in the museums, bringing new contracts to the craftspersons. Some craftspersons offered visits and demonstrations in their own workshops. In Marija Bistrica, a local master decided to establish a small museum collection in his workshop for gingerbread-making. A local tourist board is planning to open a house for toy-making in the centre of the town. Some craftspersons searched for past models of their products in order to offer items for living history events and traditional festivals.

Conclusion

The project clearly showed that building new capacities in the border region cannot be imagined without the involvement of the younger generation. Therefore, educational workshops, in which crafts and skills were learned and youth participants received the knowledge transmitted by experienced craftspersons, were one of the highlights of the project. Although they were small groups of pupils learning different trades at vocational schools, their positive approach and pride in being part of the project encouraged the authorities to look for the models to include traditional crafts in the regular educational process. More and more we are aware that if we lose practical skills we lose a significant capacity in society. And this could become a huge problem in the future.

The attention that the project paid to strategic partnerships was also an example of good practice, and it secured the future sustainability of the project. Partners continue to exchange exhibitions, participate in joint promotions and conduct joint research. New results are used to draft new projects and we are currently evaluating a new project on traditional crafts which is based on the outcomes of CRAFTATTRACT. The project also encouraged new partnerships with the chambers of commerce, chambers of craftspersons and development agencies. The project was awarded Croatia's National Museum Award for the best museum project in 2008 and was presented at several international conferences. 🇭🇷

NOTES

1. The concept of the museum in Kumrovec was drafted by the well-known Croatian ethnologist, Ph. Dr. Mirjana Gušić.
2. Croatia earns between 19 and 20% of its national GDP from tourism.
3. The Croatian Government published the first *Strategy for Cultural Tourism* in 2003 as an official document.
4. The main objective and the specific goals were the drafted according to the procedure required for the grant application.
5. There is a very strict procedure for craft registration and many traditional crafts and skills cannot fulfil the criteria. Some have managed to register as supplementary activities but some are still in a so-called 'grey area'.
6. The full title of the book was *On the Path of Craftspersons along the Slovenian – Croatian Border*.
7. The exhibition catalogue was published in three languages: Croatian, Slovenian and English
8. The web site is: www.craftattract.com
9. Dr. Tomislav Šola presented Canadian experiences in modelling econo-museums.
10. Croatia was among the first European countries to ratify the 2003 UNESCO *Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* and made various efforts to protect intangible heritage on the national level. The Croatian Ministry of Culture developed a range of initiatives that provided support and expertise in the field.

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