

Safeguarding Traditional Crafts in Europe

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This entry discusses the challenge of safeguarding crafts in Europe. Safeguarding is defined herein as the systematic process of understanding, representing, preserving, and valorizing crafts following the recommendations of UNESCO and the UN-World Tourism Organization. The abovementioned challenges are discussed through a multidisciplinary prism starting from the scientific challenges in the information and communication technologies sector and expanding the discussion to ethical, legal, and policy-making measures and recommendations to safeguard crafts as a form of tangible and intangible cultural heritage but also as a source of growth and impact for the communities that practice them. To this end, the role of education and training for craft preservation is discussed, considering that the declining number of practitioners and apprentices is considered today the main threat to their preservation.

Keywords: crafts ; craft understanding ; craft representation ; craft preservation ; craft valorization

1. Introduction

Crafts have been an important part of the European cultural and historical identity since the Industrial Revolution, the establishment of applied art schools, and the Arts and Crafts ^[1] and the Bauhaus movements ^[2]. At the same time, craft history is related to the origins of modern societies, history, culture, and local traditions, as well as personal and family memories, to which all general audiences can relate. The study of crafts in social, historical, and economic contexts reveals aspects of Europe's history (e.g., ^[3]), the impact of global events, and technological progress in different locations in Europe, as well as memories of past European societies and their current values. The internationally celebrated vocabulary of traditional and contemporary European designs, as well as those from local sociohistorical contexts, are reused and promoted through their diffusion in new products ^[4].

Crafts are an important and recognized component of European cultural heritage (CH). Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) forms an important part of Europe's cultural and historical identity, while crafts comprise a pillar of European culture and European cultural industries. Many crafts have common roots all around Europe, while influences vary according to region and context.

This entry discusses the urgent matter of safeguarding crafts in Europe. Their decline will negatively affect our understanding of European culture and CH and will be followed by the social and economic de-valorization of the regions, communities, and countries in which they are practiced. This article starts with a discussion on the current state of the art in [Section 2](#), followed by an overview of the technical progress achieved toward a scientific methodology and tools for the representation and presentation of crafts as a first step towards their preservation ([Section 3](#)). Of course, this cannot be achieved without the help of craft communities, which are the core of our craft traditions. Their empowerment is the main topic of discussion in [Section 4](#). In the globalized economy, while facing mass-production countries, craft communities should be equipped with the appropriate tools to protect their intellectual property, design, and know-how by facilitating existing protection methods and making the most out of the European legislation currently in effect. These subjects are discussed in depth in [Section 5](#). Finally, [Section 6](#) discusses the preservation of craft practice. It is argued that by empowering formal and informal education, a new generation of European craft masters will emerge. This entry concludes with a collection of policy recommendations to further support the goal of safeguarding crafts in Europe and future research directions.

The contribution of this work is summarized as a systematic attempt to identify the current landscape of crafts safeguarding by summarizing existing methods, tools, research efforts, and legal instruments. At the same time, it provides concrete directions to support the further utilization of each of the above to further empower safeguarding efforts at all levels. As such, it can be used as a guide to craft representation and presentation projects. Furthermore, it lays the foundations for future work both at research and policy levels and highlights the necessary building blocks according to a wide, multidisciplinary perspective. It is aspired that this work has the potential to engage more people from

interdisciplinary domains in safeguarding traditional crafts as living heritage, a source of common traditions, and a sustainable form of eco-friendly production and heritage valorization.

References

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