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GPS – New ways to Basketry Craft in Germany, Poland and Slovakia

report from a study trip II
Lichtenfels, January 26 – 30, 2026

The Zentrum europäischer Flechtkultur (ZEF), host of the second project meeting, prepared a rich professional program in Lichtenfels. In designing the program, they took into account the existence of the State Vocational School (Staatliche Berufsschule) in Lichtenfels, which also includes an apprentice basketry school with a three-year course in basket making design.

Working day 1 – Tuesday, January 27:

Into the formal basketry education system in Germany

The State Vocational School in Lichtenfels not only provides technical knowledge and professional skills, but is also synonymous with practical education, regionally based educational programs, and close cooperation with companies in the region. More than 1,400 students are taught by 62 teachers in the fields of economics and administration, metalworking, product design, and information technology. The School in Lichtenfels includes two nationally recognized specialized technical colleges, including a **technical college for basketry design**. This school, which enjoys high international recognition, is the only school of its kind in Germany to offer a three-year full-time course in the field, combining traditional craftsmanship with contemporary product design.

During the morning working meeting, we defined the starting points for our project, which we wanted to discuss during the afternoon tour of the basketry school with its representatives (director, teachers, students). The primary and most **important starting point** is the question we also mentioned in the grant application: **What are the opportunities for graduates of basketry schools to become basket makers?**

German state vocational schools are renowned for using a dual education system. The vocational school is therefore a partner of companies, and students gain real-world experience in their chosen field during their studies. However, dual practice does not apply to basketry school, as the professional basket making community does not allow it—there are no basket making companies in the region. However, if a student will find an independent basket maker who would be willing to take him/her on, dual practice would be possible, according to the teachers.

The basketry school currently has 22 students in three grades. This is not a large number, but given the employment opportunities in the field after graduation, it is sufficient. The director of State Vocational School in Lichtenfels **Joachim Selzam** and the Bavarian government, which funds the school, are satisfied with this situation. Through this school, it supports the preservation of crafts typical for Bavaria—in addition to the basketry school, there are also vocational schools for woodcarving, stonemasonry, and glassmaking, for example.

The basketry school is also open to people from abroad (aged 16 to 65) – they can study there free of charge, provided they complete all subjects of the 3-year course in German. Basket makers from around the world can also visit the school for short-term job shadowing as part of the Erasmus+ program. And the school is also open to international exchanges of experience.

Teacher **Stefan Meiners**, who graduated from this school in 2006, gave us a closer look at the professional basket making classes at the school and the equipment in the workshops and other spaces. He gained his teaching experience through several years of work at the Porträt Schule für Holzbildhauerei in Brienz, Switzerland, where the basket making and wickerwork department still operates today.

Stefan Meiners sees vocational education in a broader context. He himself is a great supporter of vocational education, which he believes is the foundation of the state system – even though in Germany today it has fewer students (1.3 million) than the humanities (2.9 million). At the basketry school in Lichtenfels, basket making is the main part of the curriculum, accounting for 25 hours of the total 38 teaching hours per week. In addition, other practical subjects (metal- and woodworking, manual and digital drawing), design, and business management are also taught on a small scale. Taking into account all holidays and other aspects, he calculates that students only works for 90 days during the year, which is not enough time to adequately master the whole range of basketry techniques. This time only allows them to learn the basics. That is why they have given to each student a key to the school. They can stay there until 8 p.m. and on Saturdays until 6 p.m. (always in pairs, for safety reasons). It is up to the student to decide how to use this opportunity for individual education, which gives them the chance to build the self-discipline that is so necessary in this craft. This model also requires the full commitment of teachers – to be as motivating as possible for students and to set an example for them.

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The main material used for weaving at the school is willow, which was traditionally used in Lichtenfels. The students mostly weave from peeled sapwood willow, although willow prepared in this way is now in short supply in Germany. During their studies, students weave round, oval, and square baskets, while learning various techniques. The time allocated to basket making lessons does not allow for all techniques to be introduced, but if a student is willing and active, the teachers are open to showing them more. This aspect of the basketry school in Lichtenfels is motivating. It encourages young (and older also) students to focus on self-improvement, which will serve them well in the job market. The other side of the coin, however, is the employment of graduates after they finish school – we will return to this systemic issue, which is also the basis for our project.

The baskets made by students are the property of the school (since the school provides the students with the materials), but students can purchase them at a price slightly above the cost of the materials if they are interested. The school can sell any remaining baskets. In addition to basket making, the school also teaches furniture making. A significant change from the past is the lack of rattan, which is used for this type of basketry work. This is due to a change in geopolitical conditions, as rattan from Asian forests was easily available to Europeans in the past as a raw material imported from colonized territories. Today, this wood is processed in its raw state directly in Asia, which is due to both the emancipation of Asian nations and China's entrepreneurship. As an alternative, basketry school in Lichtenfels are increasingly using the hazel (which is a local material), heated for bending in a steaming chamber.

In addition to weaving itself, students at the basketry school in Lichtenfels also learn how to grow willow on their own field and how to process and prepare it for weaving.

The school workshops and classrooms are very well equipped, as we had the opportunity to see it during a tour of the school. In addition to the workshops, the school also has a library of basketry books and magazines, an archive of framed weavings, weaving molds, and baskets made from various materials and from different countries around the world. All of these are accessible to students and teachers, who draw inspiration from them throughout the year.

The tour of the school was followed by a **discussion with school representatives**. Some interesting opinions were expressed, which we will summarize here.

Teachers' approach to students

According to their own words, teachers at the school do not train basket weavers, but provide students with an introduction to basket weaving. They teach them skills and, through repetition, enable them to better understand the diversity of weaving techniques. Only when the students have sufficient skill, they can begin to create aesthetically pleasing products. With this foundation, they can also be more creative, as they know what the material allows them to do. Creativity is often needed by basket makers today, as they must adapt their products to the needs and tastes of their contemporaries. But the craft is in first place.

A similar approach to improving craft skills is also used at the French basketry school in Fayl-Billot, where it is possible to take a one-year intensive course. As part of this course, students weave seven traditional baskets of different shapes, ten pieces of each. According to representatives of the French school, these craft basics enable students to understand the advanced aspects of basketry and also give them room for creativity.

This raises the question of what is more important in basketry today. Is it excellent craftsmanship or design vision? According to some, with excellent craftsmanship, the craftspeople will also develop a design level – their products are beautiful, useful, and sells well. If it does not sell, something is wrong. Either it has lost its functionality for the present day, or it does not correspond to it aesthetically or in terms of quality of workmanship. In that case, a designer with an artistic and functional vision of the product can help. However, a prerequisite should be that they master the craft, otherwise the products they design will only be interesting in form. Basket designers should also draw on their knowledge of traditional patterns and techniques. A good example of this are contemporary basket makers of working age around the world – many of whom studied design but decided to make a living from the craft. Thanks to their contribution, the craft has a design dimension – their products are original, contemporary, functional, and highly aesthetic. In this form, the craft is also relevant today.

Practical training with experienced basket makers during and after school

During the debate, students said they would welcome practical training with basket makers during their studies. It might be a good idea to connect them with workshops in the vicinity of the school, where they could eventually be employed by older basket makers who would eventually hand over their workshops to them. And perhaps they could earn extra money during the holidays if they had sufficient skills and quality of work. The students themselves would welcome visits from experienced basket makers directly at the school to introduce them to lesser-known techniques during a limited period of time. They are drawing on the experience of previous graduates, who were taught at the school by Danish basket maker Klaus Titze thanks to the Erasmus+ program.

The second option for students is to travel abroad, where they would meet basket makers in their own homes. They would also learn more about their lifestyle and whether it would suit them. Many basket makers

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live modestly, in harmony with nature, voluntarily renouncing consumer society. This is not a solution for everyone.

It would be good to conduct a survey among basket makers about their motivation for pursuing basketry. Why did they choose it? What is their goal in life? How did they feel about it at different stages of their lives (as young people, new parents, after turning 50, etc.)? This would be an interesting area of research for further development, from which we could learn a lot for our project (or its continuation in the future) about the motivation of basket makers. It would be interesting also to capture their statements on video. Or organize a joint conference of successful European basket makers, where they would talk about what made them successful and give a closer look at their work. These are moments that can be motivating for basketry students or those interested in basketry from other countries.

The doors are also open to students of German school to Slovakia and Poland, as we have jointly concluded. For example, within the Erasmus+ program. We presented the Slovak and Polish models of craft care to them. They could learn to work with other materials than willow rods. They could also delve deeper into non-production aspects of the craft, for example through Serfenta models, such as how to make a business plan, how to promote the products, how to expand the topic of basketry from production to courses, exhibitions or lectures, etc.

It is good if students gain this experience after graduating from school so that they are not forced to jump straight into business. Erasmus+ offers opportunities for this – in the future, we want to use the GPS project to create a network of basketry organizations and basket makers who will provide education in various areas.

In this context, the topic of passing on the experience of skilled craftsmen to the next generation also seems relevant (and not only for Germany). Or capturing the experience of masters who preserve unique techniques for those who are interested in them. In Poland, there is a program run by the Ministry of Culture that reimburses masters for the time they devote to apprentices. Another possibility is to film selected basketry techniques on video, which is something the Association of Basket Makers in Slovakia has experience with.

Basketry as a full-time job

The question of how to make a living from basket making is not only relevant to students at the German school. It is a challenge for the whole of Europe, as there are currently no specific support mechanisms in place for traditional craftsmen or designers. Yet through their activities, they preserve an intangible cultural heritage that is important to the state, but cannot compete with commercial products with similar functionality or design. We need to start working systematically to give basketry a future. Young people (or adults wishing to retrain) should choose it because it offers the prospect of earning a living. And it does not have to be just about making baskets – today, experiential teaching of the craft is also an integral part of basketry. In this regard, it seems essential to connect actors in the field of basketry across Europe and to jointly seek support from influential people across different sectors. Craftsmanship not only has a cultural dimension, but also has the potential to develop the local economy, the countryside, and tourism. It is also a suitable element of education, whether for children or adults, developing their fine motor skills and willpower and providing mental health and therapeutic benefits.

The long-term goal of our project is to collect examples of good practice from across Europe and show different ways in which people can learn a craft. And, of course, to use these examples of good practice in our own countries, or possibly to create a European movement that would have the quantitative and qualitative strength to be a partner in improving conditions for basketry. We can learn from each other.

German schools today are training employees for companies that do not exist. This is perhaps the fundamental problem with current education in the field of traditional crafts, which exceeds the capabilities of those involved in basketry. It could perhaps be solved by creating a system that would be supported by both politicians and financial groups. And that would only be possible once they realized the importance of craftsmanship for the healthy development of society. For that to happen, we need to connect, create larger entities that will be relevant partners for people with influence. According to the students, the school in Lichtenfels is of very high quality – they learn a lot of information, gain skills, learn to distinguish quality in basketry, cultivate the will to work independently, etc. However, after leaving the school, they are left to their own devices, which again is not the fault of anyone involved in the field of basketry. It is the reality of today's society, which is primarily profit-oriented and tends to favor big capital. However, the opportunity to seek positive development through programs such as Erasmus+ is enriching and should be fully exploited in the future. Towards further projects that set "higher" goals, i.e., those that will lead to improving the status of basket makers and craftsmen in general.

Student activity

We have already discussed the possibility of German school students staying at school after classes and continuing their basket weaving work. This raises the question of the students' capacity to take advantage of this opportunity. Some do not have to pay for accommodation or meals, or their parents provide for them. However, there are also those who have to take care of themselves and earn money to cover their study-related expenses.

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Not to mention that after school, they sometimes don't have the energy to devote to basketry. This is also related to the activities offered by ZEF to the school's students. Many have not yet visited the ZEF. Of course, this may reflect the individual approach of the students themselves. But perhaps all it takes is a little improvement in communication between the students themselves so that they can pass on information to each other, or an improvement in communication between teachers and ZEF so that ZEF activities are promoted more in the school. Today, there is a noticeable barrier between some teachers and ZEF, which may stem from mutual misunderstanding or old grievances that no longer have anything to do with today's reality. Today's reality is that interested people need to come together to promote basketry – this is the only way to stay alive.

How prepared are students for reality?

The question posed to German students in relation to basket making as a livelihood was: What does the world need from basket weaving today? The students want to try to make a living as basket makers (they have an idea of the possible range of products) – they say they will see what reality brings. Another student, who is about to graduate, says that she will probably not be able to pay all her monthly bills from basket making alone; she will probably not earn more than a thousand euros a month. In this regard, she says that the school does not teach her, for example, how to do business, how to market her products and services, etc. On the other hand, it is noted that mastering all the skills necessary to run one's own business is difficult for one person today and comes at the expense of basket making itself, as the craftsman "loses" a lot of time in sales, marketing, communication, etc.

Here, the GPS project (in the long term) could involve the creation of non-production-type consulting for basket weavers. Whether in individual countries or internationally, with the aim of promoting basket making. ZEF, which has many contacts abroad, could be a good partner for the German school.

Another possibility is the creation of multi-person enterprises, where individual parts of the business would be divided among specialists. This would give basket makers more time for production itself, or rather, a clearer head. And experts in the field would deal with sales, marketing, and the design of new products and services. This is still a dream for the future – but it could also be the subject of future projects.

The world has changed in recent decades. Basketry is no longer just about producing goods (it is difficult to compete with cheaper industrially manufactured products); it is opening up to the public, involving them directly in the product creation process (courses, creative workshops, production demonstrations) or in debates about the place of craftsmanship in today's world (exhibitions, lectures, outdoor creation, etc.) and also showing a possible way of life associated with the values of craftsmanship (relationship with nature, working with one's own hands, self-sufficiency, independence, etc.). Serfenta, for example, also started its business by selling baskets from the best craftsmen. However, they could not make a living from it, which is why they switched to selling services related to basketry and, more broadly, to the development of intangible cultural heritage.

Working day 2 – Wednesday, January 28:

Searching for a framework for the efforts of actors in the field of basketry

Full of impressions from the first day, which was packed with lots of ideas, we visited the basketry school again on Wednesday morning, this time as "students". We attended a demonstration drawing class, where expert teacher **Oliver Reese** explained the basics of digital technical drawing. This has recently become an important part of the final exams in school. In the past, students submitted a woven product as their graduation project, which they could work on practically throughout the entire school year. Today, they have about six weeks to weave a product (which in reality corresponds to the time needed to make a piece for a customer), and the exam also includes drawing – either by hand or digitally, depending on the nature of the piece the student designs. For digital drawing, they work in the Rhinoceros 3D program. Oliver Reese demonstrated the basic functions of this program to our group while creating a technical drawing for a pedig frame.

The practical production of the frame under the supervision of Stefan Meiners followed the drawing lesson. It was a basic simulation of teaching the production of bent furniture using a flame and a clamp holder. Once again, we can say that the school's equipment with work tools is of a high standard. And after completing the frame and burning the initials "GPS 2026" on it, we can also say that it is characteristic of our project efforts, which aim to find a common framework for basketry.

We ended our morning visit to the school with a conversation with **Uwe Böker**, the technical director of the basketry school, who is responsible for teaching the basics of basket making to first-class students. He comes from a family of basket makers and is a proponent of the "old" approach to basketry, particularly through the production of traditional utility baskets. However, the question of making a living from this type of work remains open even in Germany – there is no organized professional basket making community here either. And so, basket makers face the challenge of making a living from basket making in their own way.

In the afternoon, web designers collaborating with ZEF arrived at the ZEF headquarters to discuss the next framework – this time, the **GPS project website**. The parent website will be in English, and then, with the

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help of artificial intelligence, the content will be translated into the national languages of the partners and edited. The website can have many sections; it is up to us to decide which ones. We will discuss the structure of the website in more detail during our stay in Slovakia in March. However, we have already set a deadline for the delivery of texts and photos for the website, which is May. The Association of Slovak Basket Makers will be responsible for the texts, Serfenta will be responsible for the photos.

The highlight of Wednesday was a **discussion among basketry experts in the** iconic premises of the **Archive of the Future** in the centre of Lichtenfels. Its reconstruction was initiated and financed by the Hofmann brothers, entrepreneurs in the field of 3D metal printing technology, and the dominant feature of the building is, appropriately, a golden metal willow tree. The Archive of the Future is a venue for events and digital exhibitions aimed at informing about innovations, promoting the exchange of experiences, and connecting local people. This is one of the reasons why the discussion on the prospects of basketry (searching for a framework for it) fit perfectly into this space.

In his introduction, **Manfred Rauh** from the **ZEF** presented the GPS project to those present, and we then have approached the activities of the associations involved in the project – Serfenta presented its business model for caring for basketry and intangible cultural heritage, and the Association of Slovak Basket Makers presented its activities, which are closely linked to the functioning of the Centre for Folk Art Production (ÚĽUV), a state organization for the protection and promotion of traditional crafts. These models will be the content of the GPS project website, so in this place we will proceed directly to summarizing the discussion with the invited guests.

Among them was **Maria Öckler**, a **student at the basketry school**, who came to study in Lichtenfels because she is fascinated by nature and plants. She thus indirectly continued our debate from the previous day at the school. When asked if she would change anything about the way the basketry school teaches if she had the opportunity, she replied that it would be the general subjects she had already learned in her youth, which she considers a waste of time. Instead, she would like to place greater emphasis on other subjects, such as marketing or how to build your own business.

Uwe Böcker, **technical director of the basketry school**, responded to her suggestion, saying that he does not see much room for change in the curriculum. The school does offer marketing, but only teaches the basics, and there is no chance of covering everything. Moreover, the current situation on the craft market is such that it is difficult to make a living exclusively from craftsmanship, which is why they prepare students for the fact that, in addition to basket weaving, they will also have to earn a living from other jobs.

Paulina Adamska from the Serfenta association added to his words with her own experience that learning good marketing or business management is more a matter of many years of practice. Because good marketing can only be done if you are active in the market, in contact with people, and developing your offer based on their needs. This is one of the reasons why Serfenta changed its range of basketry products, moving from selling masterpieces to selling services (creative workshops, lectures, business model setup, etc.). It is difficult to make a living solely from craftsmanship today, and every day is a new challenge. There are no long-term frameworks that guarantee that something will work without change. It is daily work, opening emails, designing a program based on people's demands. It is working with real people, which is why you have to like them and build your program for them – which is especially true when selling services.

The **Federal Guild Association of Basketry**, represented by **Dorothée Rentsch**, a graduate of the basketry school in Lichtenfels, is also addressing the question of how to make basketry more attractive. She herself feels that the association's cooperation with basketry practice is not sufficient.

During our working stay in Lichtenfels as part of the GPS project, we saw an urgent need to provide expertise on selected non-production topics related to the craft, even in the form of online discussions or individual consultations. The challenge is to build a team of experts in specific areas who understand the needs of basket makers and can give them practical advice on their dilemmas or portfolio settings.

Side note: With the current focus of basket making on experiential services, the question arises as to whether this will reduce the number of outstanding masters who were outstanding in the past because they devoted themselves solely to basket making. In this context, it seems necessary to create models that would also support outstanding masters (a model that works in terms of status is, for example, the awarding of the title of Master of folk art production in Slovakia – however, the financial framework of this model still needs to be worked on so that active masters with this title are also rewarded for their work in preserving traditional techniques). It would also be good to create a financial framework to reward the transfer of knowledge from masters to the younger generation interested in basketry.

So, one thing in contemporary basketry is to focus on marketing and selling services to the public. On the other hand, however, it is necessary to support the best masters and, through them, maintain quality in basketry. As was stated the previous day during a discussion at the school, European basket makers today cannot compete with companies that industrially manufacture similar goods or import basketry products from third world countries.

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This remark is important because we also want to convince outstanding basket makers who have their own businesses and for whom our efforts to promote basketry could otherwise be seen as competition of the validity of the GPS project's ideas. It is therefore necessary to involve legislators and influential people in our efforts so that we can appreciate the best basket makers and convince them to share their experience with younger people. This will ensure that basketry is a segment that will develop in a spirit of cooperation. So that people don't play in their own sandboxes, which, after all, was somewhat reflected in Wednesday's discussion.

This was also the spirit of the question posed to local politician **Matthias Söllner**, who is the **2nd deputy mayor of Lichtenfels**. According to him, every craft has a modern, industrial side, but also a traditional one. He himself has worked as a baker for many years and therefore understands the need to support traditional crafts. He considers ZEF to be a very useful organization in the context of the development of basketry in Lichtenfels. As a local politician, he knows that in recent years the association has had limited resources for its activities, and with it the Korbmarkt festival. However, he is also aware that such an institution and festival are the pride of the city and that other cities would welcome them with open arms. Local politicians leave it to experts to increase the attractiveness of the craft, but they could make basketry more attractive from their position if they made private enterprise more attractive to young people. And perhaps with an emphasis on developing intangible cultural heritage. (Extending the concept of traditional crafts to include non-artistic crafts is an interesting idea for Slovakia, for example. This would increase the number of people involved in traditional crafts, which would create a better basis for promoting their interests.)

Matthias Söllner also mentioned the example of a man who trained as a basket maker in Lichtenfels and then moved hundreds of kilometers away, opened a basket shop on a cycle path, and is now running a successful business. He added that it is more difficult for a basket maker to succeed in Lichtenfels and its surroundings because people here are used to baskets, and if anyone ever buys anything, it is usually only during the Korbmarkt festival. So, in addition to good ideas, location and, possibly, the purchasing power of the population also play a role. Another topic to think about…

The question regarding the necessity of design in craftsmanship was directed at **Levin Fuchs**, project manager at **Coburger Designforum Oberfranken**. Since 2001, this association has been dedicated to the topic of practically applied design. When it was founded, it benefited from the Bavarian state government's decision to support design as a decisive factor in economic development. The main task of the association is to inform the Upper Franconia region about the importance of design, to generate enthusiasm for it, and to seek support for it – whether from businesses, the younger generation, or municipalities. The association also works to connect crafts with the market. As already mentioned, it is important to find your clientele and adapt to their wishes, which may differ from what you want to offer. And that can be problematic in traditional crafts. That is why they strive for interdisciplinary dialogue, for example by connecting students from a basketry school with architecture students from Coburg. It is a mutually beneficial collaboration – design students awaken new synapses in their brains by working with their hands, and craftsmen get to think about non-production topics related to their craft (the aforementioned marketing, sales of products and services etc.).

Designers and craftsmen should always work together. Designers are more theoretical, while craftsmen are more practical. They should engage in dialogue from the design stage through implementation to the final product and its marketing. A good example is the automotive industry, where products are constantly being innovated and always finding new customers.

Both sides can benefit from this exchange of experiences. Institutions dedicated to crafts and design in all three GPS project countries are working to network these people. And this needs to start in secondary schools. However, this requires teachers to be open to this idea – without them, it cannot happen. Students often produce or design interesting products that could benefit from good marketing or minor artistic modifications, or, on the other hand, high-quality workmanship, and could be very marketable.

Side note: We have already discussed this area of cooperation at the basketry school, and therefore it seems essential for our project once again – to achieve natural cooperation between both segments so that it enriches future graduates of both the basketry school and design school. A good example is the functioning of ÚĽUV since 1945 – creation in various areas of crafts has always been based on a trialogue between the master craftsman, the designer, and the salesperson.

As **Paulina Adamska** confirmed, the focus on design today is not only about the product, but also about the creative process, for example through creative workshops or public presentations of crafts, and the contemporary dimension of crafts can also be therapeutic. In other words, design today is also about designing services. What can you offer the end customer to make your product (goods, service) appealing to them? There are many basketry materials, and each country emphasizes different aspects of them. Each material has its own unique story, and behind each material are specific people and their stories, which we can tell in our own ways. That is also contemporary design. It is always about people, about us, about our cooperation. Over the years, Serfenta has discovered how important it is for people today to be involved in the creative process. Of course, in the end, there is always a product, but the process that leads to it is also important.

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Johannes Zeck, managing director of the **Research and Application Center for Digital Technologies of the Future** in Lichtenfels, said that craftsmanship can also be an inspiration for digital directions, as they always draw on historical knowledge. He also touched on the often-discussed benefits and dangers of artificial intelligence – according to him, it can be used, for example, for interdisciplinary interactions, which can lead to new approaches in areas such as basket making.

Erika Rudíková from **Association of Slovak Basket Makers** described the reality of basket making in Slovakia. In the past, there were apprentice basket weaving schools in Czechoslovakia. Today, in Slovakia, there is only one, which is intended for people with visual impairments. However, its graduates do not work as self-employed persons after completing their training, but rather as part of a sheltered workshop. At the beginning of the year, she worked on updating the basket maker professional card in connection with the new law on lifelong learning, which defines the topics and time required for graduates to be able to work as basket makers in practice. However, it is very difficult for people to pursue basket making professionally, even in Slovakia.

She herself is a basket maker alongside her job as a programmer. Similarly, many of her basket maker friends around the world have in common that they are struggling to make a living from basket making. If there are any, they are mainly in France and England, but most have another job in addition to basket making. Their products are masterful and well-designed, and they also teach courses, but they do not earn enough to make a living.

Paulina Adamska pointed out how to make a living from basket making. In recent years, basket making in Serfenta has also been seen as a form of therapy. Working with your hands is relaxing for people today, who are often lost in the virtual environment, and can also be used in rehabilitation programs. Basketry and crafts in general are also about perseverance if you want to achieve results or improve. Serfenta also takes this aspect into account in its programs – it does not focus as much on traditional baskets as it did in the beginning, because they have lost their functionality and people no longer use them as much. Therefore, Serfenta began to look for other answers – and found them in the fact that people today want experience above all else.

Tomáš Mikolaj, who represented both the **Association of Slovak Basket Makers** and **ÚĽUV** in the discussion, spoke about the role of institutional support for crafts and the responsibility of cultural organizations for the development of this segment. According to him, state institutions are caught between two millstones – from below, craftspeople expect them to ensure decent conditions for practicing their craft. Above them, however, are politicians and influential people whose priorities (at least in Slovakia) lie elsewhere than in traditional crafts (or in supporting culture in general). Sometimes, an employee of an institution feels that all their efforts are in vain because, after years of working at the institution, they have not managed to contribute to the creation of systemic conditions that would benefit traditional craftspeople. On the other hand, the efforts made are reflected each year in a number of valuable events and activities that keep the craft alive. Through mutual cooperation between like-minded people, the institutions create opportunities for professional growth and promote crafts and, through the Association of Slovak Basket Makers, basket making as a living heritage.

But is that enough? What prospects do young people have if we want to encourage them to devote themselves fully to basket weaving? Unfortunately, this aspect currently depends on individuals, their will and intentions. Institutions help them in this, but it is not systemic support that would help them better compete with industrial mass production or multinational imports of cheap baskets from third world countries. Unfortunately, this is the reality of the free market, where state support can even be considered unjustified. What is negative is also that support for rural areas and rural life is declining year by year in the European countries – people are increasingly moving to large cities, where they are guaranteed better earnings or greater cultural diversity, etc., which is also fueled by the mass media.

Of course, every country is different, with its own history and specific characteristics. However, we can say that a common feature is the lack of systematic support for craftspeople. In Slovakia, through ÚĽUV, we network people with a common interest in crafts, in the field of basketry also with the help of the Association of Slovak Basket Makers, which can develop the topic more intensively. We are also trying to involve local governments in our efforts to give basketry a more natural dimension (for example, by planting willow trees in the village of Vrbovce, which has brought local people closer to basketry, once a natural part of their village life). It is also necessary to take into account developments prior to 1989, when the socialist regime, on the one hand, interrupted the natural transmission of crafts by banning private businesses. On the other hand, however, it created an institution (ÚĽUV) which, thanks to state support, has preserved many dying traditional crafts and still has a professional say in the development of crafts.

We believe that the discussion opened up a number of topics that would be worth exploring in greater depth in the future. The limited time and wide range of topics allowed only for an introduction to the issues. Perhaps the GPS project could also include deeper online discussions on selected topics. And with the participation of experts also from other European countries. This would create a good basis for submitting another project in the Erasmus+ program, to which other organizations that are part of the Network of European Basketry Associations would also be invited.

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Working day 3 – Thursday, January 29:

Interdisciplinary overlaps of craft

After two intense days full of discussions, Thursday was a more relaxed day, during which we summarized our impressions from the previous days at a morning working meeting. Everything naturally leads to the third study trip to Slovakia, where the outlined topics will be concluded.

In the afternoon, we visited historic Bamberg and attended the 36th annual **Bamberger Kurzfilm Tage** film festival in the early evening. Thanks to Jennifer Rubach from ZEF, who, in addition to basket making, also documents basketry events on film, the festival included a section of films with a craft theme called **Handgemacht**. Of the six films presented, two focused on basket making in Poland and Slovakia: Korzene (**Roots**), about Serfenta's efforts to preserve the tradition of weaving baskets from roots, and Slamienkar (**Strawbasket Maker**) about the original naturist Ján Patinka, who wove straw baskets in the village of Vrbovce, where this tradition had been alive for many years. After the screening, we were able to introduce the full house at the Bamberg cinema in a discussion with the organizers about our GPS project, and also to talk about traditional basket making in our countries based on the films that were shown.

The creative exchange of views and experiences continued after the festival during a get-together with the creators of the other films (filmmakers, designers) and their artistically inclined friends from Bamberg. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, our films were very well received, with German viewers repeatedly saying that the traditional way of life they saw through the protagonists of the films was extremely inspiring for them. Several people (including students from the basketry school in Lichtenfels, who were also present at the festival) said that they would like to visit our countries to learn these techniques in their natural environment.

Once again, we touch on the topic of supporting the rural way of life, which in today's world is increasingly distant from life in big cities – people from cities see it as a healthy foundation. And basketry is often about the rural way of life, about a deeper immersion in nature, in the local landscape, in local materials, in a slower way of life…

Of course, the question arises as to how to present this philosophy of life to the wider public and gain support for it from people with decision-making powers. One example, although it goes beyond the scope of our project, is that in Italy, abandoned Alpine villages were recently repopulated through a call offering free housing to anyone who decided to live there. Many people applied, and they were selected on the basis of a points system, with priority given to those with prospects – i.e., young people, families with children, or professions that can sustain life in the villages (teachers, craftsmen, service providers, etc.).

Looking back on the experience of the short film festival, we can conclude that another possible topic for development is raising the media profile of basket making. For three years now, the Korbmarkt festival has included a film festival with a basketry theme. One possible vision that has emerged from the GPS project is to create a European basketry videochannel on the internet, or to promote basketry and crafts in general more in the mass media. Cooperation with documentary film students and established filmmakers is open, which would bring another kind of energy to the basketry segment alongside the energy of craftsmanship and design. The systematic development of a visual identity for basketry will certainly increase the popularity of the craft and help open the door to greater financial and symbolic support. These are all interconnected vessels, especially in today's visual age.

Brief summary

Our working stay in Lichtenfels confirmed the direction of our project. In contact with other actors in the field of basketry, we are expanding our scope and gradually raising other fundamental questions. We are slowly preparing for a stay in Slovakia, during which we will confront our findings in another cultural environment, characterized in particular by the existence of a state-established institution for the protection and promotion of crafts.

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