GPS – Fresh Approaches to Basketry Craft in Germany, Poland and Slovakia

GPS

NEW WAYS TO BASKETRY CRAFT

Final report for the Erasmus+ project



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Introduction

Let's start at the end. Over an intensive year of sharing experience and holding discussions, our project enabled us to identify eight areas we believe need deeper exploration to support the further development of basketry:

1. **Education** *(basketry education today must bring together practical skills, enterprise, communication and collaboration)*
2. **Craft experience** *(basketry offers meaningful hands-on experiences that connect people with nature, with themselves, and with traditional knowledge)*
3. **Innovation through entrepreneurship and design thinking** *(a sustainable future for basketry calls for an offer shaped around people, shared values and flexible business models)*
4. **Promotion** *(raising visibility, storytelling and collaborative communication help basketry reach new learners, customers and supporters)*
5. **Strong communities** *(trust, mutual support and active exchange are key foundations for long-term collaboration in basketry)*
6. **The value of basketry** *(basketry creates cultural, social, environmental, local and international value that goes beyond the finished product)*
7. **Craft, design and innovation** *(traditional basketry stays relevant when makers and designers work together to develop new ideas)*
8. **Sustainability** *(basketry offers eco-friendly alternatives thanks to natural materials, low energy use in production and the long life cycle of products)*

At the outset, as we considered the aims of our project, it was hard to imagine the complexity that would ultimately emerge from our interactions. We want to keep building on the shared foundation of ideas we have shaped, together with a wider circle of kindred basketry organizations and individuals.

But back to the beginning. Our three associations have known one another for a few years, yet it was only through the Erasmus+ project that we gained the calm space for sustained discussions, a deeper understanding of our partners' professional motivations, and – through stays in each country – a closer look at their work and, in part, the basketry traditions of those places.

To get to know different models of basketry first-hand, we set five-day study visits in each country. In practice, it proved a good choice – although, as ideas multiplied alongside a packed programme of specialist activities, it became increasingly clear that we could sometimes have done with more time to reflect on what we had taken in. Ongoing summaries of our experiences and proposals for next steps were supported by brief reports written straight after each visit, as well as online meetings that kept our ideas moving forward.

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Study Visit I: Cieszyn, Poland, 29 September – 3 October 2025

The first study visit was hosted by the Serfenta association in late September and early October 2025, at its home base in Cieszyn, Poland. From the outset, we reaffirmed the intention also set out in our application: our project aims to identify positive examples in each country, as well as the risks and challenges, so these can then be used to further develop ideas that strengthen the position of basketry and basket makers. While the working methods, resources and histories of the project partners differ, we were united by this shared goal. We know that the outcomes we define can inspire further development – not only within our own associations, but more broadly across European basketry. We also agreed unanimously that, in our respective countries, each of us sooner or later encounters certain constraints that hold back our activities.

Serfenta: Research – design thinking – enterprise

Alongside our joint exploration of the project's aims, our time in Cieszyn gave us a closer look at the work of the Serfenta association, which bases its approach on the principle of "research - design thinking - enterprise". Serfenta is, above all, the duo Paulina Adamska and Łucja Cieslar, supported by an external team of craft tutors. The association began its work in 2011 with ethnographic research, seeking to understand who practises basketry and, crucially, why. That research captured the stories – and, above all, the skills – of a number of Polish basketmakers, and these remain the foundation of Serfenta's work to this day.

Ethnographic research works with tradition. Serfenta wanted to turn that tradition into something contemporary for the public – whether through selling masterfully made basketry pieces or offering basketry courses. It took some time, though, before these ideas truly found their audience. Along the way, Serfenta benefited from the expert support of Urszula Szwed, an external adviser who guided the association through the process of becoming economically sustainable. Thanks to her, the association's activities became a fully fledged profession for its members. Alongside specialist basketry and ethnological expertise (for instance, through a project reviving weaving with spruce roots in the village of Jaworzynka, which we also visited during the study trip), they developed what is now an essential skill: understanding the market. This led them to tailor the association's activities to what people actually need. Today, people will pay for a product only if they feel they genuinely have a use for it. In professional circles, this approach is known as the "design thinking process". With its help, Serfenta gradually broadened its work from basketry to the wider field of intangible cultural heritage – linking ideas to solutions, and solutions to the market.

Changing expectations among basketry customers led Serfenta beyond selling master craftspeople's work and running long-term courses towards new forms of activity. They shifted their focus more towards the creative process itself, which resulted in distinctive short, experience-led workshops. Thanks to the association's growing visibility and consistent marketing, people from all over the world now take part. The main aim of these courses is, above all, to offer people a chance to switch off through making – when hands are busy and the mind can settle. That is something modern life demands more and more. Often, a craft workshop becomes almost a therapeutic process, helping participants (adults and children alike) better understand themselves, as well as the skill and effort involved in basketry – and, as a result, the pricing of basketry products. With that kind of first-hand experience, people are then less hesitant, for example, about buying a basket from the master makers whose work Serfenta still offers at its headquarters.

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Today, a key source of income for Serfenta is also sharing its know-how with other organizations working in the field of intangible cultural heritage. Paulina Adamska and Łucja Cieslar are certified specialists in intangible cultural heritage (not only basketry). They present Serfenta's business model in a range of settings (not just cultural ones) and inspire others to work innovatively in this field (including local authorities and state cultural organizations)… This year they launched a new project designed to help people create their own craft experience. The project addresses questions such as: How do you design a craft workshop that still stays true to tradition? How do you prepare to work with people? How do you tell the story of your work in an engaging way? And also: how important is it to win over a well-known personality to the value and meaning of what you do?

Serfenta managed to link its idea with a well-known figure through the Polish author Agata Romaniuk. In her children's book series *The Cat Gang*, set in the town of Cieszyn, she even included the basketry workshop of the tomcat Morfeusz, located at Serfenta's headquarters by Cieszyn's main square. orfeusz, being a cat, fittingly works with cattail. *The Cat Gang* became a bestseller in Poland, and people from all over the country come to Cieszyn to pick up a town map at the tourist information centre and hunt for the cats from the book, indoors and out… This collaboration has h awareness of basketry and cattail, because it reached (through children) people's hearts directly. One standout activity recently was the public weaving of a long cat's tail from cattail, which brought together people from Cieszyn and Český Těšín (once a single town, split between two countries after 1918). At Serfenta, they call these powerful moments "touch points", and they form part of their business model. Through their work, they speak not only to people's needs, but to their emotions too.

This approach now goes beyond basketry itself and helps to build a values-led society. Serfenta therefore also acts as an agent of social change, responding to the needs of today's world. It works sustainably within the organization and out towards the public. It helps people recognize the value of craft and basketry, strengthening their connection to nature and their surroundings, to traditional materials, and to making things by hand. A particularly profound contribution is the therapeutic, restorative dimension of its craft courses…

Serfenta is viable and continues to grow, not least thanks to systematic promotion and raising its profile in the spirit of the "design thinking process".






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Study Visit II: Lichtenfels, Germany, 26–30 January 2026

After moving beyond basketry towards intangible cultural heritage on a broader scale – through the way the Serfenta association operates – we returned to the basketry craft during our second study visit, this time in Lichtenfels, Germany. In this 'capital of German basketry', there is a three-year basketry apprenticeship school as well as the annual Korbmarkt fair, Europe's largest sales event dedicated to basketry. The event is organized by the Zentrum europäischer Flechtkultur Lichtenfels (ZEF), a city-funded organization that supports basketry life in Lichtenfels throughout the year. In recent years, as public budgets have generally tightened and the city's support has decreased, ZEF has been diversifying its activities and has also become active internationally.

ZEF has long worked to bring the basketry sector together in a region where, until quite recently, the craft was the main livelihood for many people. It provides fresh impetus that could help ensure basketry not only retains its proud history, but also remains an attractive field today. Its aim is to make full use of the potential of a town with a basketry heritage – above all by creating opportunities for young graduates of the local basketry school to find work in their profession.

This set of issues – opening up a whole range of themes – also shaped the programme for our second study visit. It also drew key figures in basketry from Lichtenfels and the surrounding area into the discussion.

Zentrum europäischer Flechtkultur: Connecting the worlds of basketry

The vocational school in Lichtenfels specializing in basketry design is the only one of its kind in Germany, offering a three-year full-time course that blends traditional craft skills with contemporary product design. In our conversations with its representatives (the director, tutors and students), a key starting point was the question of what prospects graduates have. It is worth noting here the dual training system in German vocational schools, where students complete placements in selected companies alongside their studies. This does not apply to the basketry school's students, however, as there are no longer any basketry businesses in the area today (something some students regret – they say they miss hands-on training with master craftspeople). The core of the curriculum is making baskets (in different shapes and from various materials) and furniture (from rattan and, more recently, hazel), accounting for 25 of the total 38 teaching hours per week. This gives students time to learn the fundamentals of basketry, though not every technique. If they are proactive and keen to progress, teachers will show them more. What's more, every student has a key to the school and can stay on after classes until eight in the evening – and even at weekends. It is then up to each student how they use these opportunities for individual development, which can also serve as a valuable exercise in self-discipline – so essential in a craft like this.

The school's workshops and classrooms are exceptionally well equipped with tools and technology. It even has its own willow patch, along with a distinctive specialist library and archives of weaving patterns, plaiting moulds, and baskets from a wide range of materials and from countries across the world.

Teachers build students' practical skills through repetition, helping them to understand better the breadth of basketry techniques. Once students reach a solid level of competence, they can begin to create more imaginatively. Craft, then, is the foundation from which design can grow. A design "intervention" becomes necessary when baskets stop selling – when they have either lost their

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in terms of function, or they simply don't match today's aesthetics. Ideally, the designer is also a basket maker – or at least understands basketry techniques and what the material can (and can't) do.

Some students would welcome the chance to do placements with master basket makers while still at school. Or to have master basket makers visit and teach at the school (in the past, the outstanding Danish basket maker Klaus Titze taught there through the Erasmus+ programme). Or the option to travel abroad to learn from basket makers (this year they had the opportunity to go to Italy). This kind of hands-on experience could also help them understand more about the day-to-day life of professional basket makers and decide whether it would suit them. Many basket makers today live modestly and choose, of their own will, to step away from consumer culture – which isn't a solution for everyone. Students also feel they lack stronger knowledge of the non-making side of basketry, such as preparing a business plan, marketing, and sales.

In a joint discussion at the school, those present agreed that graduates would benefit from an additional year to gain this kind of experience – including the option to travel with support from the Erasmus+ programme, potentially coordinated by ZEF, as the school does not have the capacity for it. For most graduates, moving straight into basketry practice (if they choose it at all) is simply too demanding, and after a while they give it up or take on another job alongside it.

Making a living from basketry is now a challenge across Europe. At present, there are no clear support mechanisms for traditional craftspeople or designers. Through their work they safeguard intangible cultural heritage – valuable to the state as a form of representation – yet they struggle to compete with commercial products offering similar functionality or design. A shared European framework could be part of the answer, because in many countries progress at this level of thinking (the basket maker as a professional) has reached a dead end. Each country makes small steps towards making life easier for the craft's practitioners, but when it really matters, they are left to manage on their own. That is the reality of a society driven primarily by profit and inclined to favour big capital. And yet basketry has real potential to strengthen local economies, revitalize rural areas and support tourism. It is materially sustainable, environmentally friendly, and requires minimal energy input – an exceptional advantage in today's resource crisis and amid global warming. What's more, it can help reinvigorate the economies of depopulating rural regions and encourage the growth of tourism.

In terms of the school's relationship with our project, we agree that it is important to improve communication – both among the students themselves and between ZEF and the teachers – so that ZEF's activities are understood as support for students and for basketry in the town as a whole. The history of this craft in Lichtenfels is long, and it includes misunderstandings and old grievances that no longer have anything to do with the present day. What is needed now is for stakeholders to come together; otherwise the craft will struggle to survive. That may also mean basket makers joining forces in smaller enterprises and broadening what they offer. It's simply easier for many people that way. That, too, is at the heart of our project.

Building on this, Lichtenfels also hosted a discussion bringing together experts from different fields to explore the future prospects of basketry. It took place in the iconic setting of the Archive of the Future in the center of Lichtenfels, dominated by a huge metal willow sculpture (a work that draws the public's attention to basketry). The Archive of the Future is a venue for events and exhibitions designed to share information about innovation, encourage the exchange of experience, and bring local residents together.

To begin with, the experts in attendance were introduced to the GPS project and the opportunities it could potentially offer for the further development of basketry in Lichtenfels. Those present agreed that, these days, it's difficult to make a living in the craft market by

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selling products alone. That's why, for example, the basketry school prepares students for the reality that, alongside basket-making, they'll need another job to earn a living. Only after years of experience might young graduates be able to try supporting themselves solely through basketry. And even then, every day will bring a fresh challenge. Today in the craft there are no long-term structures that guarantee things will stay the same. Everything depends on the individual. Guilds and associations do exist, but there's a lack of concrete measures that would help make basketry – and traditional crafts in general – more appealing. It seems that even at decision-making level, proposed solutions still hinge on individual initiative. Overall, the system doesn't work. And as a result, traditional craft suffers.

Possible solutions were already highlighted by the Serfenta model – alongside making products, place a stronger focus on marketing and on selling basketry services. At the same time, we mustn't lose sight of the very best masters, because they are the ones who keep quality alive in basketry. And since European basket makers today struggle to compete with companies that mass-produce similar goods or import basketry products from third-world countries, a long-term aim appears to be bringing lawmakers and influential people into our efforts. Only then will we be able to properly recognize the best basket makers and encourage them to share their experience with younger people. In this way, basketry can develop in a spirit of cooperation.

Local politicians recognise that both ZEF and the Korbmarkt festival are a source of pride for the town – and that other towns would welcome them with open arms. They also understand that, from their position, they can make basketry more attractive by making private enterprise more appealing for young people. And perhaps by putting greater emphasis on developing intangible cultural heritage as well.

The discussion also includes the Coburger Designforum Oberfranken, which since 2001 has focused on design in real-world practice and in recent years has worked with ZEF as well. Because the range offered by traditional craftspeople, including basket makers, isn't always seen as "contemporary", they aim to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue between craft, design, marketing and sales. Designers and craftspeople should always work together. Designers tend to be more theoretical, while craftspeople are more hands-on. They should stay in conversation from the design stage, through making, right up to the finished product and how it's marketed. This way of thinking needs to be developed from secondary school onwards, though that requires agreement between schools or individual partners. And the outcome of a design dialogue today isn't only an innovative product. Services can be designed too – and even the stories we tell about our efforts. Design always aims for appeal, so that products and services connect with people. In practice, Serfenta is already delivering on this very successfully.

Those present who work in the field also confirm just how tough it is for basket makers to make a living. And it's not only an issue for the three countries involved in the project. Even in other economically strong countries of the West, very few people can live solely from basketry today. Many produce masterful, well-designed pieces and even teach courses, yet still don't earn enough.

The institutional support for crafts mentioned earlier could be part of the answer, but without political backing it remains little more than wishful thinking. People in cultural organizations often feel their efforts are in vain, because even after years of work they haven't managed to help create the systemic conditions that would benefit traditional craftspeople. On the other hand, that work is reflected each year in a wealth of worthwhile events and activities that bring craftspeople to the public's attention and help keep the craft alive as living heritage.

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This interdisciplinary discussion was the first of its kind, and what we took from it has encouraged us to use this format again in future. Ideally, the discussions would focus onnarrower topics and involve fewer participants, so that the issues can be discussed in greater depth. Online discussions also clearly have potential, with experts from other countries taking part.

We rounded off our stay in Germany at the *36th Bamberger Kurzfilm Tage* (short film festival). There, we publicly presented our project to a wider range of interested people – visual artists and fine artists, designers and students alike. We did so both through a discussion on the sustainability of basketry in today's society and by screening two basketry-themed films. Both the Polish and the Slovak film also offered a glimpse of the traditional way of life in our countries. This way of life is already in decline in Germany, so films from Central Europe opened up further possible dimensions of our project – a turn towards rural living in harmony with nature and with care for the environment. In the discussion that followed, many audience members expressed an interest in visiting our countries in person; some students from a basketry school even said they would like to come and try working first-hand with the materials shown in the films (straw, roots).

Our participation in the Bamberg film festival served as a symbolic bridge from our time in Germany to Slovakia, where we had the chance to experience what collaboration really looks like first-hand. There was little time to catch our breath between the two stays – but that only spurred us on to develop the ideas we'd sketched out so far with even greater intensity.









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Study Visit III: Slovakia, 2–7 March 2026

Slovakia is a close-knit country. With a relatively small population, people are often connected – sometimes through personal relationships too. Much the same applies to the associations and institutions we had the chance to get to know during our third and final study visit.

One organization that is truly distinctive in Slovakia is the Centre for Folk Art Production (ÚĽUV). As a state-established institution, it is responsible for supporting and developing traditional crafts. It was at a professional colloquium in 2017, initiated by ÚĽUV, that the idea emerged to found the Association of Slovak Basket makers – and the two organizations continue to work closely together to this day.

Centre for Folk Art Production: A constant star in the craft firmament

As part of our study visit to Slovakia, we spent the first two days getting to know ÚĽUV – both at its headquarters in Bratislava and at its branch in Banská Bystrica. We were introduced to the institution's history by the exhibition *One Inspiration, Two Paths. ÚĽUV 1945 – 1989*, which charts its story from its founding in 1945 through to 1989. That year, Slovakia's political and economic system changed, and ÚĽUV gradually shifted its focus from production towards cultural and educational work.

Even so, many tried-and-tested approaches were preserved. One example is the collaboration between craftspeople and specialists – whether designers, artists or ethnologists. Drawing on numerous detailed field studies of traditional crafts, a database of research reports, photographs and three-dimensional objects was created (now housed in the Museum of Folk Art Production). Artists could then draw on this material in dialogue with practising craftspeople. In this way, one can speak of a deliberately guided design approach to traditional crafts in Slovakia, intended to refresh tradition for contemporary needs. This was done with restraint, and with respect for traditional materials, patterns and technologies.

To this day, ÚĽUV still operates expert committees that regularly assess the quality of submitted products. Items are put forward for review by ÚĽUV's in-house staff, who share responsibility for overseeing individual crafts by material category. The makers are either craftspeople themselves, or products may also be created through collaboration between a craftsperson and a designer. This takes place in ÚĽUV's Open Studio, a space for new work rooted in tradition. Every two years, designers and makers can pit their work against one another in the international competition *Circles on Water*, founded by ÚĽUV in 2000.

ÚĽUV also supports craftspeople in a number of other ways today. Particularly useful are book series on selected crafts for children and adults, the twice-yearly magazine *Craft, Art, Design*, and the much-used study resources on the ÚĽUV website (an online encyclopedia of traditional crafts, with a dedicated section on traditional dress). The website also hosts a publicly accessible database of products approved by ÚĽUV's artistic committee, as well as a directory of active makers featuring their stories, product photos and contact details. In recent years, ÚĽUV has produced annual instructional videos showing production techniques, freely available online. Each year, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the institution honours the very best makers with the title Master of Folk Artistic Production – an award held in high regard in Slovak society – and promotes recipients publicly as exemplars of outstanding craft practice. A dedicated marketing department regularly keeps the public informed about developments in traditional crafts through various channels and works with the media.

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A chapter in its own right is education. In 2024 – to mark the 25th anniversary of its founding – ÚĽUV's School of Crafts was inscribed on UNESCO's *Register of Good Safeguarding Practices of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The School's main aim is to provide systematic leisure-time learning in traditional crafts. Its target groups include children, young people, adults and seniors – anyone can take part, without distinction. Whether through regular courses during term time or the holidays, one-off excursions or creative workshops for children's groups and adults, or methodological seminars for different audiences. Each course has its own methodology and syllabus (the School of Crafts has a dedicated methodology role), progressing from simpler tasks to more complex ones. Many graduates go on to further craft training at the School, either continuing with the same material or trying a different one. Some later become collaborating makers for ÚĽUV, able to develop their quality through dialogue with ÚĽUV's specialists or by taking part in professional events that ÚĽUV organizes throughout the year. For inspiration, they also have access to a well-stocked library and the above-mentioned museum with its collections. Others become craft tutors themselves, helping to keep the tradition going.

Overall, it can be said that over the years a strong community has formed around ÚĽUV, bringing together organizers, makers, tutors, visitors and customers, and keeping Slovakia's traditional artistic crafts vibrant and viable.

Through its professional input (rather than financial support), it also helps craft associations to operate, and it was precisely the overlap between ÚĽUV and the Association of Slovak Basketmakers that formed the focus of an expert discussion we hosted at ÚĽUV, with representatives from ÚĽUV, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, and the University in Cieszyn. We presented the aims of our project, addressed sensitive issues facing contemporary craft in a shared dialogue, and outlined topics whose development appears crucial to the future of basketry – and, more broadly, traditional artistic crafts.

Above all, we increasingly feel we need to kick-start a bottom-up initiative. For the time being, there is still no systematic support from the top for developing the traditional crafts sector, though with sustained effort that can certainly change. Across Europe, a number of initiatives are highlighting this need – most notably the European Crafts Alliance, of which ÚĽUV is also a member, and the European network of basketry organizations, whose activities are being driven by Manfred Rauh, also looks promising.

Today, ÚĽUV in Slovakia also connects key players in traditional crafts and design. It has the people, the premises and, to some extent, the financial means to do so. It welcomes active associations that can – through shared dialogue – move things forward within specific crafts. Representatives of the Ministry of Culture likewise describe ÚĽUV as a "national treasure", and although it has recently had to reduce staffing levels as part of public finance consolidation (as other state-established organizations have), that does nothing to diminish its importance.

Craft skills have been intertwined with enterprise from the very beginning. Craftspeople can generate income for the country; they are part of the economy – especially the rural economy, which is now essential to sustainable development and Europe's "green" agenda (using local natural materials, environmentally responsible production, and repopulating countryside areas that are losing residents). At the same time, the conditions craftspeople face in their own countries often push them into the grey economy. That is why we need to communicate a shift in how craft is viewed: so that craft becomes a natural part of an economy attractive enough to draw in young people as well; so that the downsides (not being able to make a living from craft) do not outweigh the benefits (which, for example, basketry still offers in abundance today).

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Craft has enormous, wide-ranging potential. These days it's no longer only about making objects, but also about experiences – for instance through creative workshops or activities open to the wider public. And in workshops it reveals a deeper dimension too: craft is now an important element in responding to mental-health crises (for example those linked to the Covid pandemic, war, digitalization or the growing individualization of society). In Germany, craft programmes are even prescribed by doctors. That is why we need to start viewing basketry in this broader context and to spark cross-departmental discussion.

Until there is interest from the top in having that kind of discussion, it is vital to move forward together rather than separately. In a larger group, solutions are easier to find – and to put into practice. The same applies internationally: the larger and stronger our movement, the sooner we will be able to open a conversation about systemic solutions with those who can genuinely influence them in practice. And there is no need to fear competition – quite the opposite: the stronger our relationships with one another, the firmer the position of craft (including basketry) will be overall.

A good example of the kind of dialogue that is possible is the initiative at the University of Cieszyn, which wants to establish an equivalent Faculty of Artistic Crafts alongside its faculties of art and design. So that young people recognize the importance of this field, both in the past and in the present, within human creativity.

ÚĽUV works on a regular basis with secondary schools specializing in arts and crafts. Students are introduced to the basics of selected crafts, and school teachers then develop the chosen topic with their pupils throughout the academic year. The outcome is often joint exhibitions, involving several schools that have explored the same theme.

We were able to see first-hand how ÚĽUV works with schools at its regional center in Banská Bystrica. It was a methodological seminar for primary school teachers. Those taking part were mainly teachers of the compulsory 'regional education' subject in Slovak primary schools, which also creates space for teaching traditional crafts. Many teachers make use of ÚĽUV's methodological seminars for this purpose. They include a talk on the chosen topic as well as practical creative workshops. As part of our project, the activity was weaving traditional Easter whips from willow, in Slovakia typical of the period leading up to Easter.

At present, completing seminars like these boosts teachers' qualifications only informally. However, in connection with the new Lifelong Learning Act, ÚĽUV is currently developing a 50-hour innovative training programme for teachers, which should also be officially recognized.

This year, it also offered – for the first time – training for craft course tutors to other Slovak institutions. With its distinctive, well-established methodology for craft courses, it can be rolled out more widely and help raise the standard of craft course provision across Slovakia.



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Association of Slovak Basketmakers: Strength lies in the community

Since 2018, the Association of Slovak Basketmakers (ZKS) has been building on the groundwork laid by ÚĽUV through its activities. Today it has over twenty members, offering them above all a space to meet and share experience with one another. None of the members is a professional basket maker, but several produce outstanding work and focus not only on willow, but also on other materials (straw, cornhusk, roots, splits, cattail and other grasses).

ZKS played a major role in organizing the Year of Natural Weaving Materials, which ÚĽUV announced in 2023. That same year, working with the village of Vrbovce, ZKS members established a willow patch featuring 24 varieties of basketry willow. This marked the start of a partnership with the village that continues and keeps growing to this day. The community willow patch has already seen three harvests, and local people have learnt how to look after it. Free of charge it provides planting stock for anyone who comes along to help look after it. People are already coming from all over Slovakia. Some local residents have also taken up willow basketry through courses run in the village each year by ZKS members. One particular challenge is weaving straw baskets, which used to be a strong local tradition (and was even showcased at the film festival in Bamberg).

That's also why our project work led us to the Myjava region, home to the village of Rudník. Together, we met local basketry activists and learnt about their approach to the craft. Thanks to strong relationships on both sides, ZKS also delivers several of its projects in Vrbovce – last year, for instance, filming step-by-step video guides to weaving baskets from willow rods, as well as a specialist symposium on jewellery made from natural weaving materials. During our stay in the region, there was also time to visit Rudník, where the traditional international Slovak-Czech basketry festival *Unusual Forms of Wicker* took place, and the day before it, ZKS members ran creative workshops for the public. In future (potentially with Erasmus+ support), it would also be possible to invite basket makers from other countries to this festival.

In the Myjava region, we saw a fine example of a larger group of people working together on a very modest budget. Through ongoing dialogue between ZKS and local residents, projects are taking shape that benefit both sides and, above all, the basketry craft itself. This approach was recognized at the start of this year in the *Face and Soul of the Village* competition, where the willow patch in Vrbovce became one of its laureates.

Even so, the question of a more systematic approach to the craft still remains. In Slovakia, that might be possible thanks to the new Lifelong Learning Act. Under it, ZKS could become certified organization to provide basketry training. The facilities in Vrbovce would support this. Furthermore, members of the ZKS were part of the working group which last year approved the content of the professional profile for the craft of basketry.



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In conclusion

After the study visits, we held regular online meetings to bring together our findings in preparation for the project website, a video documentary and the final report.

As we said at the outset, we weren't sure what the outcomes of our project would be. But with each study visit and every online meeting, the possible directions became clearer. Other specialists also joined our group – both in expert discussions and during the study visits themselves – adding their own perspectives to the topic.

Together, the project enabled us to map current educational initiatives in basketry – and, more broadly, in crafts – across our three countries. This opportunity gave us a wide-ranging insight into other systems, from which our associations can draw inspiration for future work. A major benefit for each association was seeing feedback from others on their work.

We have seen for ourselves that sharing tried-and-tested practice matters, because we are stronger together. Once the project has finished, we will certainly be better able to withstand crisis situations too. Together, we are also thinking about the future of basketry as a craft. We want to pass our findings on. The first opportunity will be on Monday, 21 September 2026, at the Specialists' Day as part of the Korbmarkt festival in Lichtenfels. There, we will present the project to a wider group of basket makers and organizers of basketry from across Europe who will be attending the festival and who are interested in getting involved. Using the World Café method, we want to gather their perspectives on four selected areas: Entrepreneurial thinking, Strength of community, Contribution of basketry to the contemporary world and Education.

Through our project we have built a strong community – a supportive, collaborative network where co-operation takes precedence over competition. That is why we want to invite other countries to join us, so that in a new, larger project we can build on what we have learned, with the long-term aim of creating a working European basketry network – one in which we learn from one another. Co-operation between institutions is both an outcome of the project and a goal for the future. The project made it clear that an individual can achieve less alone than through mutual cooperation.

At first, as we continue to develop our ideas, we will focus on people who want to join the project. For that reason, we also need to keep the project outputs alive, so that we do not waste the potential and so that people do not lose the motivation to keep going. And then, hopefully, people who may currently see our project as competition to their own basketry efforts will join us too.

So our task now is to bring basketry into the spotlight. So that it is not hidden away, guarding its secrets, but instead encourages people to make something themselves or to buy a product. So that it sparks clear thoughts in people: "Ah, so this is a basket – an eco-friendly alternative to the plastics that are gradually overwhelming us. And unlike them, it actually lasts." Or: "Ah, so this is a basket made from natural resources from our surroundings, crafted by someone local."

Campaigns to champion basketry could gradually find a place in each of the participating countries. We've had word that other countries in the Network of European Basketry Associations are also keen to get involved in the next stage of our project. In that case, an appealing idea could be a campaign such as "At least one basket in every European household". If this idea took hold in practice, it would create work for many people, draw plenty of newcomers into basketry, and, not least, raise the profile of basketry itself.

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Basketry pieces may not be the cheapest, but each one carries a story – along with durability, sustainability, local roots, human skill, craftsmanship and an artist's eye. That's what sets them apart from standardized industrial products. What's more, they keep alive age-old techniques, passed down and refined through generations, as well as the independent way of life so typical of craftspeople.

Today, basketry needs fresh, appealing ideas that will draw young people to the craft too – so they can see it can provide a living and become a truly fulfilling working life. Through our project, we want to gradually build up an offer that speaks to them. And not only in basketry itself, but also in learning the non-production sides of the craft (for example, how to run a business today, what makes marketing and sales work, what principles shape artistic creation, and so on).

Only in this way can basketry become a natural part of our society. It offers many profound benefits, all of which align with Europe's green direction (locally sourced materials with a negative carbon footprint, local eco-friendly production with minimal energy use, long-lasting products, 100% biodegradability, and social sustainability). We tried to take the same "green" approach in our project too. For meetings we travelled by train, or shared one car as a group. We ate in local restaurants serving local food. We stored project documents on a platform with servers in Germany that runs exclusively on renewable energy, and for any printing (if) we used recycled office paper.

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A year in the project was a fresh experience for all of us, and a truly powerful one. It gave us a calm space for in-depth conversations and for really immersing ourselves in the different ways basketry can work. We'll be taking a great deal of it into our future work. And together, we'll build on what we've learned with other countries too – perhaps in another Erasmus+ project. Our long-term vision is clear: to create a basketry movement that supports both the craft's practitioners and basketry itself.



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