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# Future of Alpine Textiles

Heritage Safeguarding Toolkit  
for Communities

October 2025

INTERTWINING CULTURES



## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

**This toolkit was created as a result of various activities carried out by the partners of the AlpTextyles project, as well as the long-standing experience of individual partners in safeguarding textile heritage in the Alps.**

**The booklet before you was designed to offer communities that are the bearers of rich textile heritage a practical tool to help them:**

- identify and document tangible and intangible elements of heritage,
- care for and safeguard objects, techniques, and stories connected with heritage,
- communicate their heritage both within the community and beyond,
- connect tradition with contemporary forms of creativity and cultural tourism, and
- legally protect their knowledge and products while presenting them on the market in a sustainable way.



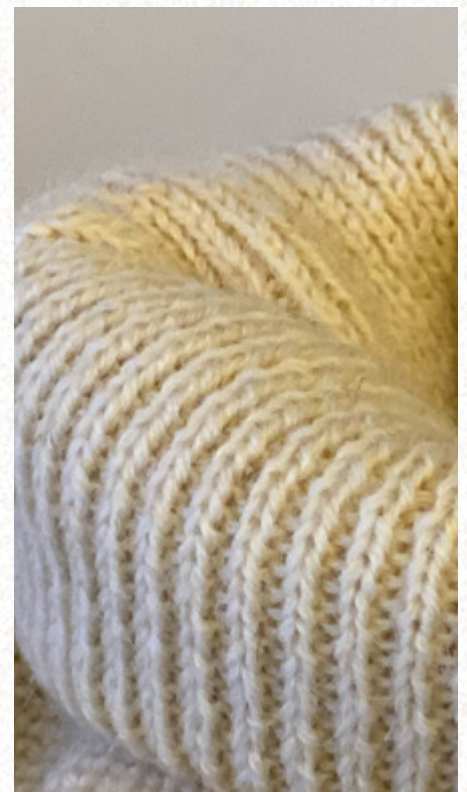


## INTRODUCTION

The toolkit is intended for everyone involved in preserving and developing heritage—local communities, schools, associations, researchers, and artisans. Its purpose is to strengthen communities' self-confidence, provide practical steps for safeguarding and transmitting knowledge, and create a space where heritage is not only the past but also a source of inspiration, innovation, and connection.

We invite you to use this handbook as a tool that allows the stories of your ancestors, the knowledge of your masters, and the richness of your local practices to live on—not only in memory, but also in the hands of new generations, in contemporary products, in workshops, in exhibitions, and in digital content.

Let curiosity, passion for creation, and the desire for connection guide you—for heritage is not only what we preserve, but also what we are able to pass on.





## MODULE OBJECTIVES

1. *Journal of Management Education*, 30(1), 10-20.

The Alpine region boasts a rich textile heritage and a long history of textile production



### Tangible heritage

Tangible heritage encompasses physical objects and spaces that are important to a community's history, art, knowledge, or identity. For clarity, it can be divided into *movable* and *immovable* heritage.

**Movable cultural heritage** includes physical objects that can be seen and touched. Their value lies not only in their beauty or functionality but also in the stories they carry.

- **Products:** e.g. handwoven blankets, traditional garments
- **Tools and instruments:** e.g. looms, scissors, spindles, wooden wool combs
- **Documents:** e.g. archives, records, photographs, pattern drawings

**Immovable cultural heritage** refers to spaces, buildings, and locations that cannot be moved and that hold cultural, historical, or aesthetic value. Examples include archaeological sites, buildings, parks and gardens, memorials, settlements and their parts, and cultural landscapes.

In the context of textile heritage, important examples include:

- **Buildings and workshops:** e.g. traditional workshops, wool-drying facilities, spaces related to flax processing, artisans' houses
- **Industrial and economic sites:** e.g. small textile manufactories, dye houses, tanneries
- **Places:** e.g. seasonal pastures and herding routes, fairgrounds, market areas





## Intangible heritage

Even more important than physical objects are the knowledge, skills, and customs that enable the creation and preservation of textile culture. Intangible heritage is living, as it exists only as long as people actively practice it, transmit it, and integrate it into their daily lives.

It includes specific methods and processes developed over generations—such as weaving, dyeing wool with plants, lace-making, embroidery, and other textile techniques that allow for the creation of patterns, structures, and decorative elements.

Equally significant are practical skills such as wool production and preparation, spinning, choosing motifs and patterns, using looms, needles, and other tools, as well as adapting products to the needs of the community.

Intangible heritage also encompasses the cultural context that gives objects meaning: the songs and rhythms that accompanied work; the fairy tales and stories connecting the past, nature, and community life; and the rituals and festivities where textiles played a central role—such as wedding veils or festive rugs.

Intergenerational transmission of knowledge is crucial, as customs and techniques are preserved only if tradition bearers actively teach younger generations. Intangible heritage is fragile—it can lose its meaning if knowledge holders are gone, if young people show little interest, or if ways of life change. Safeguarding it requires active community involvement.



## What does it mean to safeguard heritage?

Safeguarding heritage means recognizing, valuing, and nurturing ancestral knowledge while ensuring the continuity of community identity and providing a source of inspiration for future development.

It involves identifying key knowledge bearers within the community and understanding the production and crafting processes developed across generations. Safeguarding heritage gives people a sense of belonging and continuity, as traditions connect communities, while rituals, collective work, and festivities strengthen solidarity and bonds among members.

At the same time, heritage serves as a rich source of creativity for new generations—traditional motifs, patterns, and techniques can be transformed into contemporary products, fashion lines, or tourism experiences, ensuring their preservation while dynamically integrating them into modern life.

## The role of the community in safeguarding heritage

Heritage is not something to be kept only in museums but a living practice that communities can actively nurture, use, and develop. Safeguarding heritage strengthens the sense of belonging—when a community researches, restores, and shares its cultural traditions, internal connections grow stronger. Communities that actively protect their heritage often develop deeper social bonds and greater mutual solidarity.

Heritage also carries significant economic potential. Traditional knowledge and skills can serve as a foundation for innovative products, such as contemporary clothing inspired by tradition. Interpreted heritage also enriches tourism experiences—today's visitors do not only want to observe but also to participate, learn, and immerse themselves in the places they visit. Cultural and creative industries can transform heritage into a lasting economic opportunity, provided it is not trivialized and remains of high quality, thus ensuring its long-term benefits for the community and local economy.

The community plays a key role in safeguarding heritage, as its active participation ensures that traditions remain alive. Community members can contribute by documenting knowledge and techniques, taking part in workshops, organizing events and exhibitions, and actively passing on customs and skills to younger generations. In doing so, they preserve not only objects and practices but also the meanings and values these carry in everyday life.





### Challenges

If heritage is not actively nurtured, it can quickly fade away. The greatest risks include:

- **Loss of knowledge due to lack of transmission**

When masters and tradition bearers pass away, their knowledge is lost if it is not shared and passed on. Without a connection between older and younger generations, or without proper documentation of processes, heritage becomes confined to museums or archives.

- **Inadequate preservation**

Textiles are sensitive to moisture, light, and pests such as moths. Without proper care and documentation, both the objects themselves and the stories attached to them can disappear.

- **Lack of interest among young people**

If younger generations do not recognize the value or potential of heritage, the transmission of knowledge is at risk. A tradition without successors loses its vitality and purpose.





## GOOD PRACTICES

## Textile heritage recognized by communities

## Coperta Poschiavina

Many families in the Poschiavo Valley (Switzerland) own a woolen blanket with wide and narrow colorful stripes in a herringbone pattern. This Poschiavo blanket is a guardian of family stories and centuries-old traditions rooted in the valley's heart. In recent decades, its colors have often been standardized.

These colorful wool blankets traditionally formed part of a daughter's dowry and were woven at home before marriage. In local households, they were central items—often placed over the kitchen bench. The Valposchiavo Museum preserves a collection of these blankets, with some on permanent display. Every family had its own unique version, differing in colors and patterns. The Tessitura Valposchiavo weaving mill still produces these blankets today, thereby safeguarding an important part of local textile heritage.

The Valposchiavo Museum also preserves a precious donation from weaver Anna Maria Foppoli—woven samples of Poschiavo blankets, fully catalogued, showing their incredible variety.

It is said that every family in the valley owns its own Poschiavo blanket, with colors inherited across generations, following centuries-old traditions—particularly prominent from the distant past until the mid-20th century—of knowledge and skill being passed down from parents to children.

As part of the AlpTextyles project, under the guidance of Polo Poschiavo, a community action was organized to collect additional materials about these family blankets.

More information: [Musei Valposchiavo](#)



## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFEGUARDING HERITAGE

- More information about Alpine textile heritage: [YouTube – MOOC link](#)
- Inscription to the registers: Registration of heritage elements can be carried out on national intangible cultural heritage lists (depending on each country) and, potentially, on the UNESCO list, which represents the highest level of safeguarding recognition.

### Examples:

- **Intangible Search:** [Link](#)
- **Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage on Ministry of Culture, Republic of Slovenia:** [Link to the register](#)
- **UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity:** [Link to the list](#)

### One bottom-up example:

- **Application Writings of Memory** is the initiative for recording intangible cultural heritage involving the elderly population and was developed by the Dobra Pot Institute. [Link to the application](#)





## PRACTICAL EXERCISE

## Identifying community heritage

### Task:

Identify the textile heritage of your community in a dedicated thematic gathering.

### Steps:

1. Divide participants into smaller groups.
2. Each group prepares a list of textile heritage elements they recognize as important. These elements may include:
  - **Objects** (e.g. garments, tools, patterns)
  - **People** (e.g. knowledge bearers, elder community members, young enthusiasts)
  - **Skills** (e.g. weaving techniques, wool dyeing, storytelling)
  - **Stories and traditions** (e.g. festivities, customs, songs, local legends)
3. At the end, groups present their lists to everyone. This highlights which elements are most frequently mentioned and what members identify as shared heritage.
4. If a generational perspective is desired, groups can be formed based on participants' ages.

### Outcome:

The community gains a clear overview of recognized heritage elements and an opportunity to begin deciding which ones are most important to document and protect.



## 2. Heritage Documentation

### MODULE OBJECTIVES

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- Learn how to collect, structure, and properly record information.
- Understand how systematic documentation supports the long-term safeguarding of heritage.

### Why document?

Documentation is the first step toward safeguarding cultural heritage. What is not recorded, photographed, or filmed can easily be lost—along with the people who carry that knowledge. Systematic documentation enables:

- Preservation of memory related to objects, knowledge, and stories
- Easier transmission of knowledge across generations
- Creation of resources for research, education, and creative use
- Public access and connection with other communities

For Alpine textile heritage, documentation includes both tangible elements (objects, tools, products) and intangible elements (knowledge, techniques, stories, and customs).





### **Ethical aspects of documenting and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage**

When communities or cultural organizations decide to document their intangible cultural heritage, it is important to understand that documentation is not merely a technical record but primarily a process of collaboration and mutual trust. Safeguarding living heritage should involve as many people as possible who actively practice and transmit that heritage.

It is crucial that knowledge bearers, practitioners, and other community members are involved from the very beginning in discussions about what will be documented, how, and for what purpose.

One of the most important aspects is obtaining informed consent from community members. They need to know what will happen to the collected material—photographs, recordings, or notes—where it will be accessible, and who may use it. Communities often have their own rules regarding which knowledge can be shared publicly and which should remain within the community. Respecting these decisions is essential for ethical documentation.

When documenting practices, it is important to present them as understood by the community, without adding stereotypes or simplifications that could distort their meaning. Some rituals or heritage elements may be sensitive or even secret; in such cases, careful consideration is required regarding whether and how to document them while preserving their intimacy and dignity.

Documentation should be an open process, with the community involved in the interpretation and presentation of the collected material. Results should be returned to the community, either as public exhibitions, workshops, or accessible archives. In this way, documentation serves not only researchers or institutions but also strengthens local identity and supports the transmission of knowledge to younger generations.

Finally, intangible cultural heritage is dynamic. It evolves alongside its environment and society, so documentation should not freeze practices in an idealized form but allow them to continue growing and adapting. Ethical documentation is therefore not a one-time act but a long-term relationship between the community, researchers, and cultural organizations, based on respect, collaboration, and mutual learning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [UNESCO ICH Guide, p. 9](#)





# What and how to document?

At the outset, it is important to establish a clear system for all participants. The system depends on whether you are documenting tangible or intangible heritage. Regardless of the type, some basic principles apply:

### Define documentation objectives

Before collecting data, clearly identify why you have chosen to document a particular object or practice. Are you preserving knowledge, building a (museum) collection, preparing an exhibition, creating content for knowledge transfer, or supporting a market presentation? Clear objectives guide the choice of methods and the level of detail needed.

### Standardise and choose the recording systems

#### • Tangible heritage:

**Objects:** garments, fabrics, patterns, textile accessories

**Tools:** looms, spindles, scissors, fiber preparation tools

**Documents:** archives, manuscripts, photographs, old books, records

Assign the same number to the object and its documentation; record storage location and complete given categories for each object:

- Basic information (name, age, place of origin)
- Object type
- Description of use
- Dimensions, materials, and production technique
- Condition of the object
- Special features
- Story related to the object (e.g., who made it, when, and why)
- Owner





## 2. HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION

### • Intangible heritage:

**Techniques and knowledge:** material processing, artisanal skills

**Stories and narratives:** personal experiences, family traditions, local legends

**Customs and practices:** festivals, rituals, communal work

Key methods are **interviews and observation** with each knowledge bearer or for each practice. In a conversation, you should tackle:

- Record the practice in details (materials used, procedural steps, tools, location)
- Knowledge bearers, and their stories accompanying the practice
- Record not only procedures but also personal feelings, values, and meaning for the community
- Using standardized forms and categories ensures clarity and comparability





### About the possibilities and requirements

#### • Documentation tools

- Camera: for photographing objects on a neutral background or in use; ideally, both approaches. Capture multiple angles and details, patterns, and dimensions.
- Computer: for editing, storing, and archiving documentation. Ensure backups and safe storage.
- Audio recorder/camera: to record stories, interviews, or demonstrations of intangible heritage, including tools and procedures.
- Standardized forms: for uniform recording of all data.
- Numbered tags: for physical objects, linking them to the documentation.
- Measuring tape: for recording object dimensions.
- Notebook and pen: for additional notes when technology fails.

#### • Digital organization and metadata

Organize photos, videos, and audio files using a unified naming system and add metadata (e.g. object name, date, author, owner, location, description, keywords) to ensure usability, searchability, and durability.

#### • Data protection

When recording people, stories, or interviews, obtain verbal or preferably written consent. Determine who has access and for what purpose. Include personal stories and experiences as allowed by participants. Record basic biographical information (name, birth year, residence, education) and personal narratives.

#### • Transparency and quality control

Regularly review documentation for accuracy and completeness. Assign a responsible person for quality control and a contact person for access to collected data.





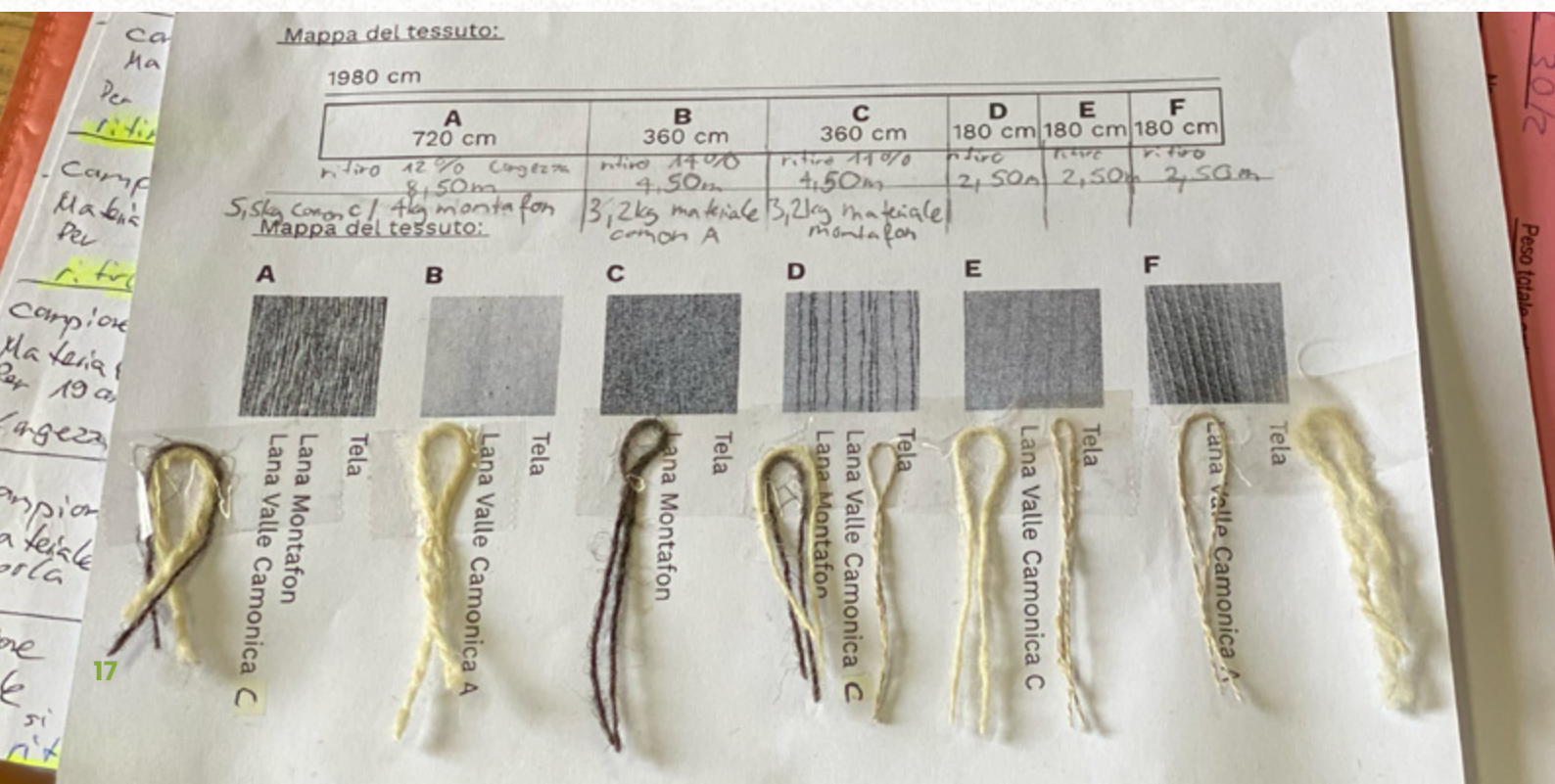
### Practical tips

- Photograph objects on a neutral background or in use to show function.
- For intangible heritage, prepare an interview structure or questionnaire to capture techniques, tools, and stories.<sup>2</sup>
- Label physical objects with neutral, durable materials; ensure labels match documentation. Use hanging tags rather than adhesives to avoid damage.

### Basic ethnographic interview principles:

- Listen more, speak less
- Ask open-ended questions
- Record facts and personal stories
- Respect participants and obtain consent for recording
- Trust is crucial; respect requests to omit or not record certain information
- Clarify any unclear data by returning to the interviewee

<sup>2</sup> You will find ideas for basic questions in the Appendix.





# GOOD PRACTICES

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**World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) toolkit** on documenting traditional knowledge: [Link to the manual](#)

## PRACTICAL EXERCISE

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### Task:

Complete a documentation sheet<sup>3</sup> for one textile heritage object from your community.

### Steps:

1. Choose an object.
2. Record all relevant data (description, dimensions, materials, story, associated person).
3. Take a photograph of the object.
4. Label the object properly.
5. If possible, add a short statement or memory from the knowledge bearer or owner.

### Outcome:

Each participant creates a basic record that the community can later integrate into a shared heritage collection or digital archive.

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3 The documentation sheet is in the Appendix.





# 3. Digitization

## MODULE OBJECTIVES

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- Learn to use digital tools for documenting and storing heritage.
- Ensure heritage data remains accessible for future generations.

## How digital records help preservation and access

When discussing digital recording of textile heritage, it is important to distinguish **two terms**:

### Digitization

Digitization is the conversion of analog information into digital form. It is a technical process in which a physical object or document becomes digital.

### Examples in textile heritage:

- Photographing or scanning handwoven textiles
- Scanning archival records, drawings, or photographs
- Recording oral stories or interviews and converting them into digital files (audio or video)





### 3. DIGITIZATION

#### Digitalization

Digitalization is a broader process that involves using digital technologies to transform, improve, or organize workflows. It is a strategic and conceptual approach, not just a technical step.

#### Examples in textile heritage:

- Creating digital collections and archives where objects and stories are organized, named, and linked with metadata (all information related to an object, skill, or story)
- Developing online catalogs or virtual exhibitions to make collections accessible to the public
- Using digital tools for education or heritage promotion (online courses, interactive apps)

The first step communities usually take is digitization—converting information into digital form—as a foundation for broader digitalization efforts.

