

ALPTEXTYLES

Orientation guide

The decalogue of circular
Alpine textiles

2025

INTERTWINING CULTURES

P. 25



INTRODUCTION

From 2022 to 2025, AlpTextyles has explored the alpine textile heritage, both its artisanal and industrial traditions, focusing on their **richness, preservation, and transmission**. The project aims to **foster sustainable, circular, and innovative value chains** across the Alps by promoting collaborative and consumer-sensitive approaches.

Through a wide range of activities, resources and cultures, from **wool, flax, and endemic plants** to **pastoralism, tourism, education, geography, traditions** and **consumption** led in **Italy, France, Switzerland, Slovenia, Austria** and **Germany**, the project has demonstrated how integrating the textile industry with various industries, **cross-border collaborations, territorial specificities** and **diverse communities** is essential in the sustainable and circular transition.

This document is designed to **help textile small and medium enterprises (SMEs)** and business support organisations **develop circular, heritage-sensitive value chains** that **meet consumer needs** for post-carbon lifestyles. It's organised around ten key points gathered in a decalogue and summarising the extensive work of project partners and offering essential insights for alpine SMEs with case studies and practical examples.



> SUMMARY

1. **Consumer expectations** highlight how Alpine products can be enhanced for end users by capitalising on Alps' image and engaging customers with story telling,
2. **Market relevance** adopts a B2B perspective to unlock the market potential of Alpine products by fostering cross-sectorial interactions and strengthening competitive advantages,
3. **Heritage consciousness** examines how exploring the diversity of traditions and foster a positive image can increase awareness and respect for Alpine heritage,
4. **Heritage protection** serves as a tool to safeguard Alpine know-how and traditions by building clear, recognisable "Alps" labels and fighting "Alpwashing",
5. **Circular and sustainable design** focuses on lowering the environmental impact of production by exploring local resources potentials and turning sustainability into an opportunity,
6. **Local value chains** demonstrate how to invent a new resilience through cooperation and circularity as key opportunities,
7. **Policy compliance** reviews EU policies for the green transition, exploring how these can be transformed into opportunities,
8. **Innovation** provides key advice on bridging gaps by fostering know-how related to extreme conditions and creating the conditions to innovate,
9. **Transmission** aims to engage the next generation by promoting traditions and developing innovative teaching methods,
10. **Inclusion** highlights the positive impact of strengthening communities and fostering collaboration across borders, territories, and generations.





01 | CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

> ENGAGE CUSTOMERS WITH STORY TELLING

Alpine SMEs have a great opportunity to connect with customers by building strong storytelling inspired by the fantastic Alpine environment: « By focusing on transparency and engaging in authentic storytelling, SMEs can effectively communicate their commitment, making it easier for consumers to choose their products ». [3]

This storytelling can come to life with **powerful visuals of artisans** and thoughtful narratives that highlight each product's unique journey. By doing so, brands create an **emotional connection** with customers, allowing them to feel good about supporting **meaningful, prosocial choices**.

In this way, brands offer more than just products, they **deliver purpose, authenticity**, and the rewarding sense of **making a positive impact**.

Narrative labels by Bellissimo

> INSPIRING EXAMPLE

Krochet Kids International : communicating handmade production

« Consumers often lack knowledge about the production processes and the people involved in creating the products they buy and use. (...) Krochet Kids International sells products that are always signed by the person who made it. On the website, you can click on "Meet the Makers" to get a picture, profile, and some more information on the person who made the product. Customers can also leave thank you notes on that site. »



emlyon - communicating value to consumers [5]

Yet, consumers alone will not lead the change towards a more circular consumption. Maud Herber, Université de Lille reminds that "According to the GreenFlex social barometer, which has been tracking attitudes in France for 20 years, **70% to 90% of people express concern for sustainable development, yet only 10% to 17% take sustainable actions**. These figures have remained consistent over the years — indicating that **consumers alone cannot drive the necessary changes**. "

If consumers are willing to play an active role in these issues, they should not be seen only as end-users in the value chain. They could be involved in sustainability efforts at various stages, for example, by taking a more proactive role in recycling or repairing.

KEY LINKS

LINK 1 [DOWNLOADABLE NARRATIVE LABELS](#)

LINK 2 [VIDEO CONSUMER INSIGHTS](#)

LINK 3 [CONSUMER WON'T SAVE THE WORLD](#)



02 | MARKET RELEVANCE

B2B market potential of Alpine products

> FOSTER CROSS-SECTORIAL INTERACTIONS

“Among products associated with the Alps, food is top of mind” [1], with spontaneous mentions of cheese, honey, herbs, spirits, and charcuterie. This makes it particularly relevant to **explore how the food industry has managed to promote and preserve its traditional know-how.**

In the context of the circular economy, **the textile industry should also consider broader applications** for its waste, particularly in connection with Alpine activities. With food and housing being the two sectors with the biggest environmental impact in Europe, **“textile waste could be employed in construction works and as fertilizer**, in two positive examples of industrial symbiosis and sustainable use of resources.” [2]



Goat cheese

// Other than being “naturally” circular in itself, the textile value chain could provide cross-sectoral contributions for a wider circular economy.

Mikael Garellick, Majda Potokar, Michael Jung, Ekaterina Stoyanova [2]



Source : “Alpine flowers” by A_Peach is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

The Mediplant pilot project, which aims to develop new natural dyes from Alpine indigenous resources, is an interesting example of a cross-sectoral fruitful collaboration.

One of the tested essence is a **larch bark-based dye which is a forestry by-product**. This material has been successfully used to develop **natural dyeing products at a reasonable price**.

This example shows that investigating by-products as a new resource is a valid approach to effectively develop competitive products by capitalising on complementarities between sectors and tackling territorial challenges.



02 | MARKET RELEVANCE

> STRENGTHEN COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

While a high price might be expected from crafted solutions or natural dyes, Mediplant mentions that dyes derived from plants like Dyer's wood or Lady's mantle are currently more expensive, but that this cost could be reduced through targeted cultivation. The price is therefore related to reaching a critical-mass and organising production by gathering several actors.

Yet, price is not the only factor when selecting a supplier: quality, flexibility, and responsiveness also play a key role. In this regard, **local and regional suppliers often prove to be more agile** by quickly responding to customer needs.



Larch bark - Extraction protocol Mediplant



Report - European Craft's Alliance

> INSPIRING EXAMPLE

In the AlpTextyles flax pilot, we connected communities from Davča in Slovenia and Val Müstair in Switzerland, who, although approaching the valorisation of flax in different ways, face similar challenges. This collaboration enabled tangible results through **knowledge transfer, sharing of experiences**, and **discussions around common issues**. Discover this incredible experience in video !

As highlighted in the report "Unveiling the Potential of the Craft Sector", **the unique human touch in handcrafted products** can be especially appealing to customers. This sensitivity is even more relevant when working with recycled materials, which may produce unexpected results. While the B2B market typically relies on standardised feedstocks to ensure consistent outputs, artisans can turn the irregularity of their work into a strength, leveraging it to emphasise their uniqueness and authenticity.

Moreover, the craft business models are not limited to product sales : Mediplant has expanded its activities by offering a custom dyeing service, allowing them to **diversify their operations and strengthening their revenue streams**. Another interesting practice is the linking of craftsmanship and **tourism**, with the aim of creating new opportunities by **strengthening bonds with consumers, showcasing expertise, and generating sales**.

KEY LINKS

LINK 1 [MOOC - MODULE 6 NATURAL INDIGO](#)

LINK 2 [POLICIES TOWARD CIRCULAR TEXTILE](#)

LINK 3 [VIDEO REVIVING FLAX IN ŠKOFJA LOKA](#)



03 | HERITAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

Being aware and respecting Alpine heritage

> EXPLORE THE DIVERSITY OF TRADITIONS

The **wool tradition has been put aside with the development of globalisation** as products have been valorised for their standardised characteristics and the making processes have been vastly disappearing.

This lack of knowledge of products' making and the progressive discovery of harmful practices towards social wellness, environmental impact and health has led to a distrust of consumers.

People's interest is growing in **understanding how a product is made, especially when it comes to re-discover traditional practices**. Behind the wool tradition lies ten thousands years of heritage from sheep breeding and transhumance, gesture to collect, wash and transform the wool.



Two women at work in the parlour: one at the spinning wheel, the other at the loom about 1890 [1]

“ In the past, luxury textiles were rare, costly, and imported from afar, while local textiles were common and affordable. Today, the value perception has reversed.

Aziza Gril-Mariotte, Director Musée des Tissus et des Arts Décoratifs, Lyon [2]



Flax harvest historical photo, used for promoting the reintroduction on of flax initiative [3]

Flax has long been essential for the production of clothing and textile in Alpine area. From the fields to the local workshops, flax contributed to the economic development and cultural heritage of local communities.

The processes to produce flax fabrics and yarns have hardly changed from prehistoric times to the beginning of the 20th century, when flax was still produced for textile purposes in some rural areas.

It is noteworthy that **these ancient activities have left architectural evidence** and artifacts that can be incorporated into **cultural journeys or museums for local communities and tourists**.



03 | HERITAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

> FOSTER A POSITIVE IMAGE OF TRADITIONS

Traditional folk cultures, especially their costumes, are linked to profound cultural streams and historical contexts. The perception of tradition is continually evolving : **“celebrated by Romanticism but rejected after World War II due to its association with Nazism, folk dress is increasingly popular in the German-speaking Alpine regions.”** [4]

Rooting traditions in a new modernity by connecting them with new mountain activities, with experiences, with education or tourism is a good way to foster a positive image of these ancient know-hows. Tourism, in particular, is crucial in the alpine space, since winter activities are threatened by global warming and the growing outlook on snow-based activities.



AlpTextyles Cultural Transhumance - 11/05/2024

In this regard, **traditional mountain activities, such as transhumance, present an interesting opportunity to attract tourists with cultural, natural, and interactive experiences** as demonstrated by the Cultural Transhumance organised by AlpTextyles in May 2024, which was highly successful.

> INSPIRING EXAMPLE

La Routo: how hiking can support local wool ?

« In 2014, the La Routo hiking trail project provided a new opportunity. By combining this project with the technical clothing, the Maison de la Transhumance secured EU funding. In 2018, under the guidance of the Maison de la Transhumance, 13 breeders founded the Collectif pour la Promotion du Mérinos d'Arles (CPMA). By 2020, membership had grown to 25, and 100 tons of wool were collected for La Routo outdoor clothing. »



ZRC SAZU – Alpine textile heritage

“Many consumers are willing to learn traditional techniques and work with their hands. Traditional weaving workshops, for instance, invite participants to spin, dye, and weave natural fibers using time-honoured methods.” [5]

It would be beneficial to include the potential of textile traditions in a broader **consideration in the essential shift of mountaineering activities** and the appeal of mountains as a summer destination. Winter **ski station are therefore strategic places to promote these know-hows** towards a cross-regional, wealthy and urban public.

KEY LINKS

LINK 1 [MOOC - MODULE 1 TEXTILE HISTORY](#)

LINK 2 [LA ROUTO HIKING TRAIL](#)

LINK 3 [VIDEO ALPTEXTYLES TRANSHUMANCE](#)



04 | HERITAGE PROTECTION

Safeguarding Alpine heritage

> BUILD CLEAR AND RECOGNISABLE “ALPS” LABELS

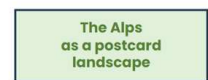
As the Alps convey a rich repertoire of sensations with a powerful impact in consumers’ mind **“trademark analysis revealed an over-use of the term “Alps” for marketing reason”** [1]. Therefore, brands that have little or no connection to the Alps as a place of production “utilise this geographic locations to imbue their products with symbolic meanings” and “depict Alpine landscapes as a site of consumption” [2].

For this reason, it is crucial to clarify the terms related to the Alps by categorising the type of activity associated with this geographical area, in order to protect local producers—for example, distinguishing between “made in,” “fiber origin,” “brand origin,” or simply using the Alps as a landscape reference.

The Alps as a place of production



The Alps as a place of consumption

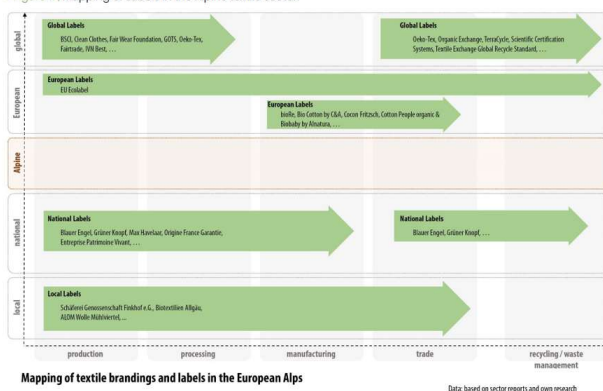


Brands and the Alps: communication models [2]

“ The Alps are not really visible in terms of institutions or certifications/labels concerning the textile and clothing ecosystem.

FAU – Alpine Textile Mapping for AlpTextyles [3]

> Figure 11 | Mapping of Labels in the Alpine textile sector.



Fau – Mapping of labels in the Alpine textile sector [1]

While numerous labels exist to protect local, national, or global productions, **the mapping of labels in the Alpine textile sector reveals a lack of protection.**

To this extent, studying practices in the food industry is very interesting, as numerous labels exist to protect local know-how, such as for cheeses or wines. **It is less known that wool breeds can also provide terroir in fibres, since breeding conditions create different fibre qualities** : “this can be seen as part of an “ingredient branding” strategy to highlight the importance of terroir in fibers. Terroir combines natural factors (climate, soil) and cultural factors (farming practices, know-how) that influence product quality.” [4]



04 | HERITAGE PROTECTION

> DETECT AND FIGHT “ALPWASHING”

As seen previously « the Alps (...) evoke sensations that are appealing and useful to strengthen brand marketing and messaging.» [3] which explain why brands use Alpine values intensively in their communications. Yet, it is necessary to detect them: “brands without productive connections to the Alps can still capitalise on the region’s image by portraying consumption against the backdrop of the Alps’ stunning landscapes. This does not constitute “AlpWashing,” as these brands do not claim their products are made in the Alps.”[3]

But the **legal protection of traditions and cultural expressions**, which are laying in the public domain, **is at risk** “as emphasised by the UNESCO and WIPO (World intellectual Property organisation): (...) the production and use of traditional products by individuals or brands outside their cultural group can result in cultural appropriation and exploitation.”[5] For instance, the use of indigenous patterns or Sikh turbans by Luxury brands could be considered as **trivialisation of culture meaning, commercial exploitation, failure to seek permission or lack of compensation**.

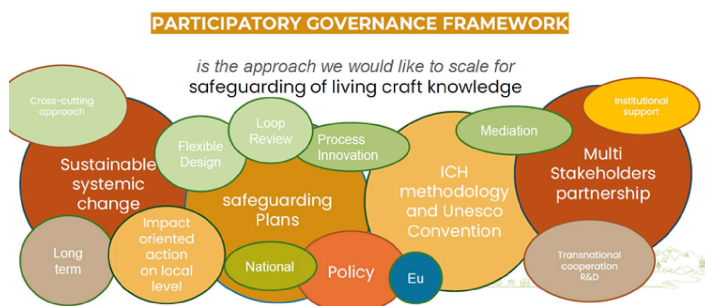


Digital Archives

To better protect heritage and cultural expressions which can take a wide variety of forms, the WIPO is defining a new category. The AlpTextyles Safeguarding Toolkit provides practical solutions.

However, brands with strong Alpine roots can **highlight their deep ties to the region in their communications** to set themselves apart from competitors. “Heritage is a market differentiator, but it must be narrated” [5] To achieve this, **alpine brands can detail their history, their connections to local know-how, they can “humanise their productions and build long-term affective bonds”.** [5]

Additionally, raising consumer awareness about traditions and supporting local communities in protecting their heritage are essential for helping SMEs improve their visibility and strengthen their communication.



Regione Lombardia

> INSPIRING EXAMPLE

Michael del Grande Naturfasern **registered the trademark Merinos d’Arles Selection© to market wool** from this indigenous breed. “While merino wool is often seen as a commodity, wool from specific regions can have distinct qualities and symbolism. Merino d’Arles wool, for instance, is not as fine as Australian or New Zealand wool but is « the finest merino wool of Europe ».” [4]

KEY LINKS

LINK 1 – [DIGITAL CULTURAL HERITAGE EUROPEANA](#)

LINK 2 – [THE SAFEGUARDING TOOLKIT](#)

LINK 3 – [WIPO’S ACTIVITIES](#)



05 | CIRCULAR & SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Lowering the environmental impact

> EXPLORE LOCAL RESOURCES POTENTIALS

The **Alpine region is particularly rich in ecosystems and resources**. Yet, resources that were once valuable, such as wool, are now left unexploited: "Due to a broken value chain, over 90% of local wool is discarded and wasted". [1]

AlpTextyles has conducted extensive work to map these resources, producing **the most comprehensive mapping of Alpine wool breeds** and highlighting know-hows along the value chain from shearing and scouring to spinning and knitting. The project also provides **successful results** with numerous collaborations led by Mediplant **to use local and invasive plants for their dyeing properties**.



Collaboration Mediplant - Atelier Sandrine Rozier

// Local sheep breeds yield small quantities of raw wool (...). This hampered market access to the global level and favors the regional development of specialised applications.

Dr. Tobias Chilla Markus Lambracht, FAU [2]



The wool library - Fibershed DACH

Eighty-three sheep breeds have been inventoried and characterised based on the primary purpose of their breeding—land maintenance, meat, wool, or milk [3]. This is an essential first step towards finding new ways to valorise wool instead of burning it. Further applications need to be explored, and **more detailed characterisations could be undertaken** : is this wool valuable for **keratin in cosmetics, lanolin as a PFAS replacement, building insulation, or fertiliser?**

Exploring new uses for unexploited natural resources and by-products could generate significant added value. In this context, the Wool Library developed by Fibershed-DACH has already demonstrated how design can serve as a powerful mean of enhancing the value of such materials.

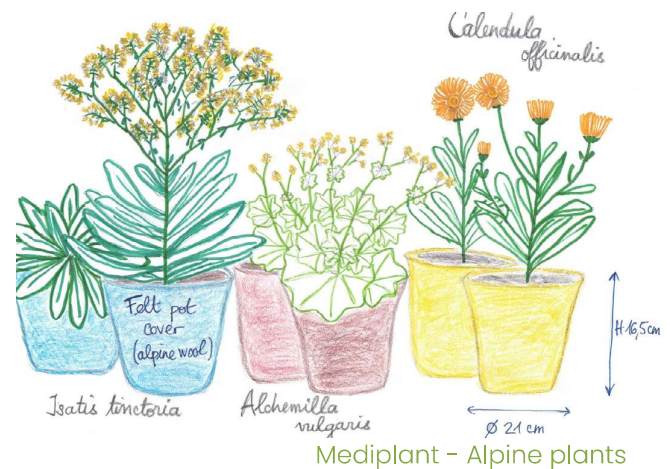


05 | CIRCULAR & SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

> SUSTAINABILITY AS AN OPPORTUNITY

The growing consumer interest in more sustainable products does not always translate into actual purchases, often due to price concerns or lack of awareness. Indeed, **sustainable products face an uneven competition with conventional and global alternatives.**

On the one hand, conventional goods (mostly imported and manufactured under opaque conditions) are sold at low price and promoted through simple and effective narratives. On the other hand, sustainable products must integrate into their cost structure the investments required to reduce their impact, which places them at a price disadvantage. They also require **consumers to make effort to understand their production impacts**, which demands more **complex marketing** and communication.



Nevertheless, **sustainability represents the future, as conventional products fail to account for the Earth's finite resources.** Yet until these limits are reached, sustainable goods will continue to face uneven competition. To move towards even market access, policy measures promoting more transparent value chains by supporting environmental classifications or new life cycle assessment (LCA) approaches can help to highlight the value of these goods. « This could lead to a situation where regional strength compared with the **safeguarding of cultural heritage increases awareness on customer side and creates regional solutions for farmers and enterprises** at all levels to better compete with regard to a growing international market. » [4]

Yet, it is worth noting that **current Alpine production is spread across many small and diverse locations**, which presents a major challenge for competing effectively at a global level and which advocate for fostering more local, resilient value chains.



> INSPIRING EXAMPLE

A sustainable product is efficient if it's bought and used instead of a conventional product.

A good example of an effective sustainable communication is the bag « I was plastic » which highlights its environmental benefit through its very design, making it one of its main selling points. « Informing consumers about the past of the materials used for a product is a simple but effective communication strategy ». [5]

KEY LINKS

LINK 1 [MOOC - MODULE 3 TEXTILE MAPPING](#)

LINK 2 [WOOL LIBRARY](#)

LINK 3 [COMMUNICATING VALUE TO CONSUMERS](#)