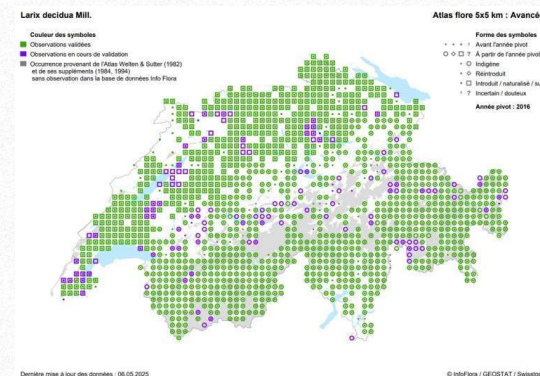## European Larch
Larix decidua Mill.

Pl.395. *Mélèze d'Europe.   Larix europæa* DC.

- ❖ Is a coniferous tree native to the mountains of central Europe, in the Alps and Carpathian Mountains.
- ❖ Its life span has been confirmed to be close to 1000 years, with ages of around 2000 years likely.
- ❖ Larch is the only deciduous conifer in Europe. Before they fall, the needles turn a bright bronze-yellow in autumn.
- ❖ The bark is pinkish-brown in colour and thick, and develops wide vertical fissures with age.
- ❖ In European folklore, larch was said to protect against enchantment. The wearing and burning of larch was thought to protect against evil spirits.
- ❖ Gives pink, orange, brown tints. Barks contain so much tannin that they self-mordant.
- ❖ Color-fast dyes on animal and plant fibers.
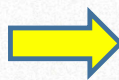- ❖ In CH, wild and widespread in the mountainous regions.

Step 1

Foresty sorting

Natural by-product

Larch woods

Tons of Bark

mediplant

Interreg
Co-funded by
the European Union
Alpine Space
AlpTextyles

Step 2

Bark drying

Few days @ 45-50°C

Step 3

Bark chips can be used as they are for dye baths or be grinded in fine powder.
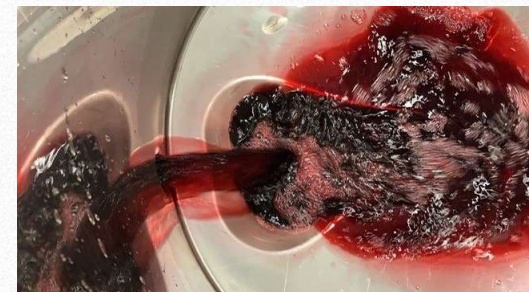

Centrifugal grinder

Step 4

Or proceed to an aqueous extraction

Decoction in hot water @ 80°C, ratio 1/10, for 1 hour

Step 5

Filtration

Step 6

Concentration of the extract

Falling film evaporator

Step 7

Packaging

Hot filling in HDPE cans

6. Responsible heritage-based innovation:
consent, recognition, and shared value

6.1 Avoiding misrepresentation, misappropriation and over-commercialization in heritage-based innovation

When textile innovation engages with living heritage, specific risks arise that are well documented in international heritage frameworks, notably within the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Three notions are particularly relevant in this context: **misrepresentation**, **decontextualization**, **misappropriation**, and **over-commercialization**.

Misrepresentation occurs when cultural practices, skills, or symbols are portrayed inaccurately, simplistically, or stereotypically. In textile and fashion contexts, this often takes the form of romanticized or folklorized depictions of mountain life, craft practices, or rural communities that do not reflect their contemporary realities. Even when visually appealing, such representations can distort meanings and undermine the cultural integrity of the practices involved.

Decontextualization refers to the extraction of elements of heritage from the social, territorial, and material contexts in which they are practised and transmitted. Techniques, motifs, or materials may be isolated from their original uses, rhythms, or value systems and redeployed as generic design references. While this can facilitate circulation and commercialization, it risks weakening the links between heritage practices and the communities that sustain them.

Misappropriation designates situations in which traditional knowledge or cultural expressions are used without the consent of their custodians, without appropriate recognition, or without any form of shared benefit. In innovation processes, misappropriation is not always intentional. It may result from asymmetries of power, lack of awareness, or the absence of clear rules governing collaboration between external actors and heritage-bearing communities.

Over-commercialisation refers not to market engagement per se, but to forms of economic exploitation that distort, erode, or dominate the social meanings, practices, and transmission of heritage. It differs from misappropriation in that over-commercialisation may occur even when heritage actors themselves are involved in market activities. In UNESCO debates, it designates situations in which market logics come to dominate heritage practices to the point that economic imperatives override cultural meanings, community priorities, or the conditions for intergenerational transmission. Typical symptoms include pressure for standardization, acceleration of production rhythms, prioritization of easily marketable product forms over culturally significant ones, and the narrowing of heritage repertoires to fit external demand. In current UNESCO debates, the effects of market engagement depend on who controls it, how benefits are distributed, and whether commercialisation remains compatible with the social functions, meanings, and viability of the heritage practices.
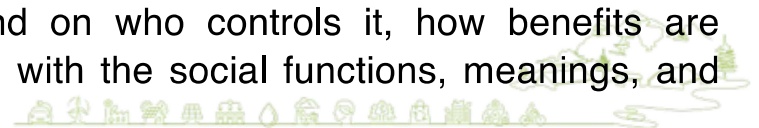
From a practical perspective, these issues are not only ethical concerns. Research on consumer responses to cultural appropriation shows that perceived misuse of cultural references can trigger negative reactions, including loss of credibility, reputational damage, and market backlash. This includes situations where products are perceived as "**heritage-washed**": formally referencing tradition while hollowing out its substance through industrial scaling or aggressive market exploitation.

For textile SMEs, designers, and intermediaries, this translates into concrete risks affecting brand legitimacy, partnerships, and long-term access to heritage resources. Projects that maximize short-term market visibility at the expense of heritage context may undermine the very cultural resources on which they depend. Responsible heritage-based innovation therefore requires **explicit safeguards built into project design and collaboration formats**, rather than corrective measures applied after products are developed.

Such safeguards might include: maintaining diversity within product portfolios, ensuring that innovation pathways remain competence-enhancing rather than competence-destroying for heritage skills, preserving space for non-market or low-market practices within heritage systems, and ensuring that communities retain agency in defining acceptable limits of change. In particular, the risk of over-commercialization is unevenly distributed across the innovation pathways identified in Section 2: it is particularly salient in pathways combining high product innovation with recombined skill repertoires, while pathways grounded in product continuity or stable repertoires tend to pose lower risks but may face challenges of under-commercialization or limited economic viability.

6.2 Reference principles and their adaptation to Alpine textile heritage contexts

To address these challenges, AlpTextyles drew on existing international principles while adapting them to the specific conditions of Alpine textile heritage. A central reference is the **3C approach**, developed by the Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative, which emerged as a pragmatic way of structuring relationships between heritage custodians and external actors. The approach highlights three core dimensions that should be addressed explicitly in any heritage-based innovation process:

- **Consent**: Have the relevant communities or knowledge holders been informed and involved, and have they agreed to the proposed uses?
- **Credit**: Are the sources of knowledge, skills, and cultural expressions clearly acknowledged and made visible?
- **Compensation**: Is there a fair form of value-sharing, which may include financial remuneration, capacity building, visibility, or long-term collaboration?

Building on similar concerns, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has developed a set of **draft steps for fashion and design contexts** intended to support respectful and meaningful engagement with Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs). Rather than proposing a single legal or contractual model, these draft steps outline a **process-oriented pathway** that can be adapted to different contexts.
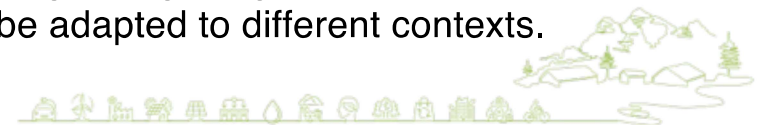
Key elements include of WIPO's Draft Steps include:

- **Cultural context research:** Understanding the origins, meanings, uses, and potential sensitivities associated with specific cultural expressions before engaging in design or development activities.
- **Identification of legitimate custodians:** Recognising that authority over practices or expressions may be collective, locally governed, or embedded in customary arrangements rather than formal institutions.
- **Relationship-building and dialogue:** Investing time in building trust, acknowledging past experiences of misuse or misrepresentation, and engaging with existing community structures.
- **Clarification of intent and scope:** Making explicit the purpose of the project, expected outputs, potential markets, and possibilities for scaling.
- **Agreement and consent processes:** Reaching shared understandings regarding uses, representations, and benefits, and recognising that communities may decide not to grant consent.
- **Attribution and benefit-sharing:** Ensuring visible acknowledgment of cultural sources and negotiating appropriate forms of value-sharing aligned with community priorities.

Although these principles and draft steps were initially developed with particular attention to contexts involving Indigenous peoples and communities facing high levels of vulnerability, AlpTextyles considers them a useful approach also in the context of Alpine textile heritage communities.
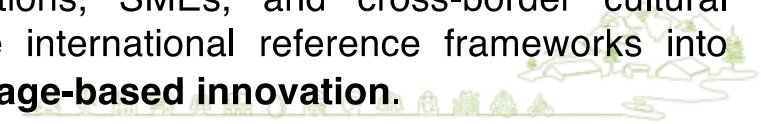
While Alpine communities generally operate within different legal, political, and economic frameworks, they nonetheless face risks of misrepresentation, marginalisation, and asymmetric collaborations when interacting with design schools, brands, or external companies. Applying these principles in Alpine contexts therefore does not imply equating situations, but rather **adapting robust safeguards to prevent extractive or unbalanced uses of living heritage**.

These orientations are consistent with the recent **UNESCO Guidance Note on the economic dimensions of intangible cultural heritage**, which emphasises that economic activities linked to ICH should support the viability of practices and the agency of communities, rather than instrumentalising heritage as a mere resource. The guidance stresses the importance of long-term perspectives, community decision-making, and the alignment of economic objectives with safeguarding goals.

Within AlpTextyles, these global principles were translated into **context-sensitive tools and practices** suited to Alpine textile ecosystems. Design briefs, ethical codes, participatory formats, and light governance arrangements were used to make consent explicit, recognition visible, and shared value negotiable, in ways compatible with small-scale organisations, SMEs, and cross-border cultural continuities. In this sense, AlpTextyles pilots adapted these international reference frameworks into **practical, locally grounded approaches to responsible heritage-based innovation**.

6.3 Putting principles into practice in AlpTextyles pilot actions

When relevant, Textyles translated these principles into **concrete devices embedded in the design and development process itself**. This was particularly important in contexts where heritage communities interacted with external actors such as designers, schools, and companies. Across its pilot actions, AlpTextyles experimented with a set of **practical instruments** that allowed responsibility to be addressed upstream, before products, narratives, or communication materials were finalised. These instruments aimed to structure collaboration in ways that reduce risks of misrepresentation and misappropriation while enabling meaningful innovation.

6.3.1 Mapping traditional cultural expressions through participatory inventorying in Valposchiavo

Responsible heritage-based innovation requires formats that allow custodian communities to actively shape how their traditional cultural expressions are identified, documented, and potentially mobilised over time. Within AlpTextyles, a particularly emblematic example of this approach was developed in Valposchiavo around the *coperta poschiavina*, a traditional wool blanket historically produced for domestic use and still present in many family households across the valley.

The initiative, focusing on **participatory inventorying as a safeguarding measure**, was coordinated by AlpFoodway partner Polo Poschiavo, the **Fondazione Musei Valposchiavo**, which plays a central role in safeguarding local cultural heritage and hosts within its premises the **Tessitura Valposchiavo**, a living textile workshop that today produces and sells its own contemporary version of the *coperta poschiavina*. AlpFoodway partner **Bellissimo**, a communication design studio, supported the creative development, community engagement, and implementation of the initiative.

During the *Festa de lo Pan Ner* in October 2023, families were invited to bring their own *coperta poschiavina* to be photographed, documented, and contextualised. Each blanket was recorded together with its material characteristics, patterns, colours, weaving structures, provenance, and, crucially, its family history and modes of use. The strong response from the local population led to the continuation of the initiative beyond the festival, allowing further documentation until mid-November.

This operation built on an existing heritage base. The Fondazione Musei Valposchiavo already hold an important collection of *coperte poschiavine* donated by the heirs of **Annamaria Foppoli**, who had previously documented the blankets she had restored. The participatory inventorying carried out within AlpTextyles significantly expanded this corpus, both quantitatively and qualitatively, by reconnecting objects with living memories, households, and narratives.
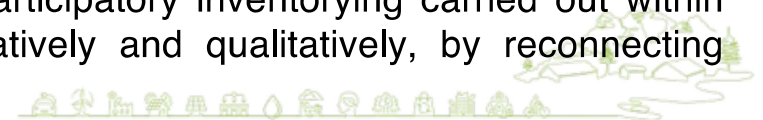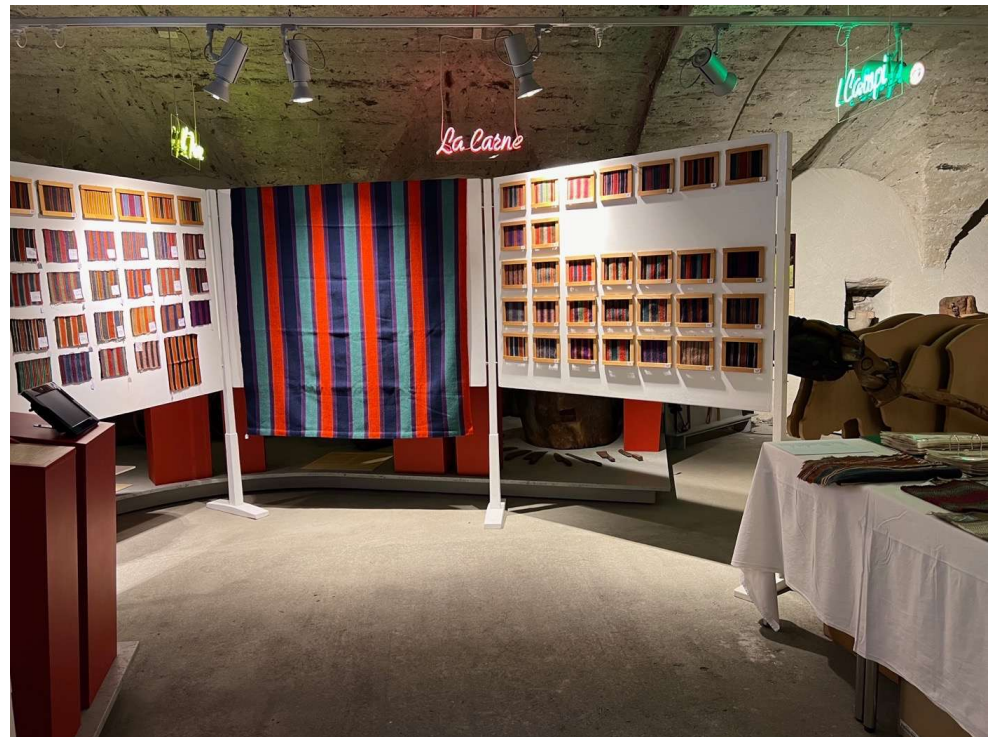
Invitation to the Valposchiavo population to bring the family's coperta poschiavina
at the Festa de lo Pan Ner 2023 (lett). Exhibition focused on the coperta Poschiavina at the Musei Valposchiavo (right).

From a UNESCO perspective, this initiative exemplifies inventorying as a **living safeguarding process** caried out with the participation of communities. It does not extract objects from their social context, but instead reinforces awareness, recognition, and transmission by involving families as active custodians. From the perspective of responsible innovation, it also performs a crucial function: it creates a **shared knowledge base on traditional cultural expressions** before any reinterpretation, or market-oriented initiative is defined.

From the perspective of responsible innovation, this initiative achieved several outcomes simultaneously:
- it recognized households and families as legitimate custodians of textile heritage, not merely as informants;
- it created a shared knowledge base that makes the diversity and variability of the *coperta poschiavina* visible, avoiding standardized or stylized representations;
- it established trust and legitimacy for any future design or valorization initiatives, by ensuring that knowledge circulation begins within the community rather than outside it.

The deliberate absence of commercial interaction at this stage is a key feature of the approach. By situating the inventorying process within a cultural and museal framework, the initiative avoids commodification and allows knowledge to be consolidated under conditions of trust and legitimacy.

At the same time, future uses are not precluded. On the contrary, it lays the groundwork for possible forms of retro-innovation or educational activities that can draw on documented diversity rather than on stylised or stereotypical representations, particularly relevant in a context where domestic production of blankets has long ceased.

This case demonstrates how participatory inventorying can function as a **bridge between safeguarding and future-oriented innovation**. It shows that involving communities as co-authors in the documentation of their heritage is not an obstacle to development, but a necessary step for ensuring that any future use of traditional cultural expressions is informed, legitimate, and socially grounded.