

Leadership, Community Resilience and Rural Regeneration in Cincu, Romania: Power to the Hands by KraftMade

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Abstract. The research question addressed in this study concerns the added value of initiatives for local development based on intangible heritage. We answer this by exploring the case study of Cincu, a village located in Transylvania, Romania (county of Braşov), founded by German settlers during the 12-13th centuries. This case study provides insights into the future of traditional crafts in Romania, as well as experiences in researching the preservation of intangible heritage, with a focus on the local context and the ways in which it may be supported. KraftMade grassroots initiative based in Cincu illustrates a sustainable and regenerative approach to the craft techniques and skills specific to this village and the wider Transylvanian region. In addition to crafts, intangible heritage is kept alive by performing old rituals (such as *Fuga Lolelor / Urzelmlaufen / The Run of the Lole*) and archiving heritage in a local museum that acts also as a community centre (*Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress*). Research data were collected from two social media accounts belonging to KraftMade and interpreted using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that, by engaging with and reactivating heritage in Transylvania, KraftMade both revitalises and reinterprets¹ traditions, transforming them in the process, and contributes to the revitalisation of local identity and development grounded in the cultural assets of Cincu. Through the work of KraftMade, heritage and regenerative futures are brought into meaningful connection.

¹ The singular form of the verb will be used when we refer to the initiative (e.g., KraftMade reinterprets), while the plural form of the verb will be used when we refer to the members of KraftMade (e.g., KraftMade reinterpret).

Keywords: creative traditions, intangible heritage, crafts, Transylvanian Saxons' heritage, regenerative futures, intergenerational knowledge and skills transmission, KraftMade

1. Introduction: The Case Studies of Cincu Village and KraftMade Initiative

The research question addressed in this study concerns the added value of initiatives for local development based on intangible heritage, such as KraftMade project. We answer this by exploring the case study of Cincu (*Großschenk* in German) village, Braşov County, Romania. Founded by the Transylvanian Saxons during the late medieval period, it is now a village of just over one thousand inhabitants (1,373 according to the 2021 population census) (Figure 1).

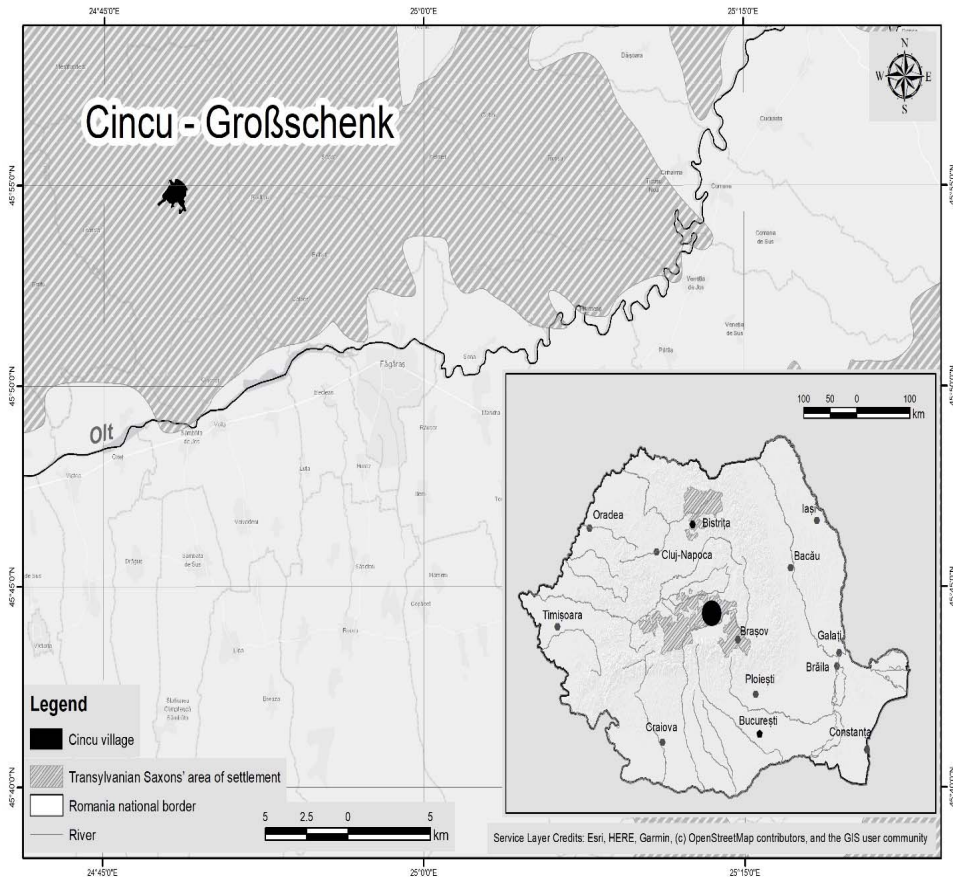
The Transylvanian Saxons, a German population first settled in the Transylvanian region of present-day Romania in the twelfth century, originate from territories that today correspond to Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Their migration was initiated at the invitation of King Géza II of Hungary, who sought to stimulate economic development and strengthen the Eastern frontiers of the Hungarian Kingdom against external incursions. The Transylvanian Saxons (*Siebenbürger Sachsen* in German) have a long historical presence in the region, leaving a durable and indelible imprint on its cultural landscape. For centuries, they flourished as industrious, highly skilled craftspeople and smallholder farmers, maintaining a distinct language and cultural heritage (Budeanca 2016; McGrath 2019; Philippi 1991).

At present, in Romania, which has a total population of slightly over 19 million, ethnic Germans number around 23,000 (according to the 2021 census – cf. Institutul Național de Statistică 2021). Although no intraethnic census has been conducted, estimates suggest that Transylvanian Saxons account for less than half of the Germans in Romania, many of whom are elderly. Their numbers have declined steadily throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from approximately 250,000 (Budeanca 2023: 78; cf. also Schipor 2019, for deportation statistics after World War II) to about 12,000.

Between 1978 and 1989, under the economically constrained totalitarian communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, a substantial number of Transylvanian Saxons emigrated to West Germany through a bilateral governmental agreement, in exchange for financial compensation for Romania. Following the events of December 1989, the majority of those who had remained emigrated between late 1989 and the first years of the 1990s, with most resettling in Germany. As a result of this significant ethnic migration, the Transylvanian Saxon population in Romania was largely depleted. In many

Transylvanian Saxon villages, only a small number of individuals of such descent remained, predominantly belonging to older generations (Budeanca 2016; Rost 2013; Schmitz 2010).

Figure 1. Cincu village, Romania, within Transylvanian Saxons' area of settlement



Source: own elaboration.

Some communities formerly abandoned by the Transylvanian Saxons have been at least partially revitalised (Havadi-Nagy et al. 2017; Ilovan et al. 2016; Ilovan and Maroşi 2019). Many individuals have returned from abroad or from urban areas within Romania to rural villages in order to preserve their heritage and maintain a connection to their roots (McGrath 2019) or remained in their

native villages and took leadership roles in local development (Havadi-Nagy et al. 2017; Ilovan and Maroși 2015). Some young Transylvanian Saxons are also returning to these communities, to safeguard the legacy inherited from their ancestors. The restoration of old objects and the revival of traditional practices provide Transylvanian Saxons with a sense of belonging, continuity, and home (McGrath 2019; Schmitz 2010).

These efforts also support the transmission of traditions to younger generations, including individuals who may belong to other ethnic groups (Havadi-Nagy et al. 2017; Ilovan et al. 2016; Ilovan and Maroși 2019). Community and belonging are defined by Marlene Herberth, the initiator of the KraftMade grassroots project in Cincu village, through her lived experience and practices. For her, Cincu represents home, the place where her roots are. In 2013, she left Bucharest for Cincu in search of tranquillity, settling in her grandparents' house, which subsequently became her permanent residence and home. Cincu represented her only stable point of reference, a place to which she returned on holiday, although she did not envisage the possibility of ever living in a rural setting. The identity of Cincu village is constituted through diverse cultural influences that she both understands and with which she identifies (Matzal 2018; McGrath 2019). She perceived herself as part of a community defined by an empathetic, family-like atmosphere. Over time, Marlene Herberth emphasises that she underwent a sustained process of adaptation, learning, and reconceptualisation of life in accordance with seasonal rhythms and in harmony with nature, within which practices such as barter and neighbourly solidarity acquire fundamental significance. These values are also reflected in the work of KraftMade (Matzal 2018; McGrath 2019).

We also analyse the KraftMade case study in relation to the role of leadership (especially considering the role of Marlene Herberth) in local regeneration and the building of resilience in rural areas within the theoretical framework of *regenerative futures*. This framework was selected due to its close alignment with the philosophy and practices articulated by members of the KraftMade project, which resonate strongly with the principles advanced in regenerative futures research (Camrass 2020, 2023; Reed 2007; Slaughter 1996; Wahl 2016). The concept of regenerative futures is grounded in the notion of regenerative development, which proposes an approach distinct from that of sustainability: rather than merely mitigating harm, it seeks to generate net positive outcomes for social and ecological systems understood as interconnected (cf. Camrass 2023: 89).

The concept of *regenerative futures* is appropriate for analysing the activities of KraftMade in order to identify the features these have and, consequently, to assess its potential impact on the small rural community of Cincu. The greater the number of regenerative features, and the more closely KraftMade's activities align with regenerative approaches, the higher their likelihood of generating meaningful change in Cincu and contributing to the strengthening of local resilience. The dominant theory of sustainability (cf. Brundtland 1987) is thus extended through the regenerative futures framework (Camrass 2023: 90). Furthermore, regenerative practice is grounded in bottom-up visions and initiatives that respond to local contexts and underpin the co-evolution of natural and human systems (Reed 2007; Camrass 2023).

We argue that the case study of Cincu rural settlement can be analysed in relation to KraftMade's regenerative thinking and practice and the leadership role of Marlene Herberth. Understanding the complexity of regeneration based on heritage at the local level is undertaken through the analysis of KraftMade as a grassroots cultural entrepreneurship initiative that both enables and constructs locally grounded visions of the future. Although it is characterised by context-specific features, the initiative also offers added value due to the transferability of its underlying philosophy and practices to other rural areas in Transylvania or in Romania, and beyond.

This paper is structured as follows. The opening section outlines the data sources and the method used for their interpretation. The results section is organised into three parts: the first examines the work of KraftMade, focusing on the needs it addresses and the motivations underlying its activities; the second identifies the key features of its guiding philosophy; and the third analyses how its actions and principles contribute to heritage preservation and local development objectives. The final section combines discussion and conclusions, situating the work of KraftMade within the regenerative futures theoretical framework and assessing its impact on the village of Cincu and beyond.

2. Methodology

The study analysed content from the KraftMade Facebook account (October 2013–December 2025, 12 years).² In addition, this was complemented by posts from KraftMade's Instagram account (March 2014–December 2025, 11 years).³ Besides social media content, the analysis was enriched by mass media interviews (published in magazines such as *Igloo*, *Scena9*, *IQads*, and *Zeppelin*)

² <https://www.facebook.com/kraftmade>

³ http://instagram.com/kraft_made

with the initiators of KraftMade (Marlene Herberth and Mihai Sibianu) and later members (e.g., Alex Herberth). The data were interpreted using thematic analysis and the theoretical framework of regenerative futures.

3. The Work of KraftMade

KraftMade started as a project of the *Noi Facem Bine* [We Do Good] Association. It has been repeatedly funded by the Romanian Cultural Fund Administration (Buică 2013). The initiators of the KraftMade.ro platform were Marlene Stanciu (later referred to in this text as Herberth) and Mihai Sibianu. Starting with 2013, Marlene Herberth and Mihai Sibianu searched for artisans in order to contribute to the preservation of Romanian and Transylvanian Saxon tradition and cultures (Stan 2016). They aimed to reconstruct the memory of place and to revive both intangible and material heritage (Matzal 2018). KraftMade is a network of artisans and creatives, oriented towards the preservation, recovery, and integration into everyday practices of craft skills inscribed in the national cultural heritage (Ghilduș and Diaconu 2015; Igloo 2013). KraftMade was launched at *The Hub Bucharest* with the *Soxen* collection, created by Marlene Herberth, Mihai Sibianu and two designers who inaugurated a series of collections developed in collaboration with artisans (Buică 2013). KraftMade recovers tradition through design. In doing this, one activity is to seek out old Transylvanian Saxon objects and garments by identifying artisans who had preserved various local traditional techniques and practices.

Since 2013, their activities have taken place across multiple geographical areas in Romania, through collaborations between designers and artisans: Transylvania (the *Soxen* collections), the Danube Delta and surrounding areas (*DeltaCraft*, in collaboration with Ecopolis), as well as the Câmpulung Muscel region and its surroundings (together with Pro Patrimonio). Their approaches aimed to identify the *genius loci* that objects can express, as well as to translate research into a clear and reproducible methodology for those interested in applying it subsequently (Matzal 2018). They have sought skilled people from across the country, remaining in constant interaction with local communities (Buică 2013).

Thus, KraftMade is a creative studio that, through the links it creates via design, brings together archaic/traditional and contemporary culture (Ghilduș and Diaconu 2015). KraftMade is a heritage- and design-driven initiative that began with design production activities that integrated techniques derived from intangible cultural heritage, through collaboration with rural artisans and product designers. It is made up of people active in both the local

and international cultural scene (Matzal 2018). Members and collaborators of KraftMade strongly advocate for the philosophy underpinning their initiative. They emphasise that KraftMade reflects their lived values and beliefs, including the primacy of nature, slow design, and the circular economy.

Therefore, the initiative facilitates a value-oriented transition in design by integrating traditional crafts and local materials into the creative process. KraftMade members underline a need that their work addresses, aimed at communities with limited access to the market. As a result, KraftMade's network of artisans and creatives, grounded in the principles of fair trade, seeks to valorise and integrate craft skills into a contemporary context by developing and materialising them into a wide range of objects and projects (Buică 2013). Moreover, KraftMade plays a mediating role in the transition from a product-centred economy to an experience-based economy (The Institute 2017). As such, another transition occurs as heritage is transformed, reinterpreted for the contemporary society and in the process of transmission (e.g. *Fuga Lolelor Festival* and ritual and *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress* – later presented in detail).

In 2013, KraftMade questioned the status of design within the contemporary context of globalisation and the digital economy, as well as the ways in which modern textile design in Romania might be developed. They advanced an expanded conception of design, demonstrating that it encompassed scientific, technological, cultural, and political dimensions. In this understanding, design functions as a mediating framework between experts and society, fostering active and participatory engagement with both the environment and issues of identity. They further argue that design processes can be understood as a form of political expression. This perspective is reflected in KraftMade's practice, which centres on design in the conception and development of artefacts, with careful attention to their prospective form and function, conditions of production, and modes of consumption. Thus, design accelerators foster creativity and are increasingly present within economic agendas, and the impact of design and craft-based entrepreneurship can contribute to broader societal change.

The KraftMade initiative was especially driven by the progressive disappearance of artisans capable of restoring or practising traditional crafts. A significant proportion of artisans are of advanced age, which highlights the need to identify ways of perpetuating their crafts (Buică 2013). In addition, KraftMade are the *creators of a cultural programme* that, over time, forms *an educational substrate*, shaping attitudes and interactions necessary in the contemporary landscape (The Institute 2017). According to their social media

accounts, they create narratives and emotional experiences materialised in slow design objects, produced using archaic craft techniques, particularly in the textile field (loom weaving and knitting by Marlene Herberth) and in woodworking (restoration and unique objects by Alex Herberth, starting with 2017). The new stage in the development and impact of KraftMade initiative begins with the inclusion of Alex Herberth in the team. He is mainly engaged in historical reconstructions and the restoration of wooden architectural elements for traditional houses. In the contemporary context, they prove that traditional skills remain relevant for reconstruction, restoration, and local regeneration.

At present, KraftMade initiative is led by Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth. Marlene Herberth has a background in anthropology, cultural policy, and design, while Alex Herberth, initially involved in the restoration and design of wooden objects, now conducts research and specialises in a range of traditional crafts and craft techniques. They are actively engaged in the revitalisation of endangered Transylvanian Saxon traditions and craft practices. Both have maternal Transylvanian Saxon ancestry and have relocated to the village of Cincu, where they reside in the former home of Marlene's grandparents (McGrath 2019). They mainly engage in the research, documentation, and transmission of craft techniques originating from Transylvanian guild traditions. Both explore the contemporary applicability of archaic concepts, natural materials, and the slow cycle of design, production, and consumption. In 2017, alongside the production of artefacts, they began developing practical training courses for craftspeople, designers, architects, and artists, aimed at transmitting craft knowledge as a sustainable, future-oriented approach, with an emphasis on the making process and its personal and cultural meanings (The Institute 2017). Thus, KraftMade is about the power of the hands transmitted intergenerationally: the application of traditional craft techniques, accompanied by a concern for relevance and utility in the contemporary context (The Institute 2017). To conclude, the aim of the KraftMade network is to pass on ancestral wisdom and skills related to crafts (Buică 2013). These are also eroded by the fact that the aspirations of young people in rural areas are predominantly oriented towards migration to cities or abroad, given that craftsmanship still lacks sufficient social prestige and economic reward to constitute a real incentive for continuity. Marlene Herberth emphasises that the rural area is often perceived as unattractive.

The leadership of Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth is evident in efforts to train both professionals and the local workforce in the use of heritage techniques, addressing a long-standing deficit that has had significant

consequences for built heritage and the cultural landscapes of Transylvania. This loss has also been deeply felt by the remaining Transylvanian Saxons who witnessed a former period of prosperity and cohesion, when a strong and committed community was able to care for and preserve its cultural assets (Rost 2013; Schmitz 2010).

Moreover, the acquisition of marketing skills is increasingly necessary in the contemporary context and should complement the knowledge held by artisans. KraftMade emphasise this requirement, as well as the challenges it presents for craftspeople. The initiative ensures the visibility of local crafts at local, regional, national, and international levels. To achieve this, it relies on collaborators and funders who support its efforts to showcase possible futures of both the material and immaterial heritage (e.g., the extensive tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Transylvania, as well as its cultural diversity, encompassing artefacts associated with Romanian, Transylvanian Saxon, Hungarian, and Roma ethnic groups) (Matzal 2018). In 2025, KraftMade discursively construct a compelling representation of space for the Transylvanian region. Transylvania is described as a land of encounters, coexistence, and dialogue between ethnic groups—a place where differences do not divide but complement each other, and where the beauty emerging from this diversity is profound, both historically and humanly.

One challenge is also to counterbalance fast consumption. KraftMade highlighted the environmentally sustainable nature of crafts in a global context, in which environmental problems have been at the forefront of the international agenda over the past three decades. Therefore, designers should create objects similar to those produced in the past, in collaboration with artisans, who are the only ones still holding the knowledge required to make those objects using simple, ecological, and sustainable techniques (Buică 2013). To conclude, the challenges of the contemporary world at both local and global levels constitute key drivers of their motivation and actions.

4. The Philosophy of KraftMade

Their philosophy is presented as a response to an alienating contemporary world, in a context characterised by the depletion of natural resources, an increasing distance from nature, and the dominance of fast consumption. They *advocate a return to nature and harmony, as well as to the wisdom of cultural heritage*, which have become leitmotifs of their discourse. KraftMade believe that moral comfort can be achieved through the practice of traditional crafts, where appreciation of craftsmanship implies its recovery and integration into everyday life. Working with artisans is seen as highly practical and sustainable

for both the economy and the environment. They emphasise that their projects, as well as the everyday usefulness of the created objects, respond to the contemporary reality of crafts in Romania. These objects combine ancient wisdom with contemporary lifestyles (The Institute 2017).

From the beginning, KraftMade have considered that *design should tell a story about the place where objects are created*, and thus that design represents place itself. Entire collections are created to capture the story of their origin; KraftMade investigate the place and its surroundings, as well as locally specific elements, including stories and local artisans. Ancestral stories are used to give meaning and depth to their cultural activities and events and, more broadly, to their engagement with Transylvanian heritage and with the heritage of Transylvanian Saxons particularly. Starting in 2024, according to their social media discourse, *it takes a whole village to preserve the heritage of Cincu*.

From museums and villages, they collect information for their projects, thereby discovering *the richness of the local intangible and tangible heritage*. Their collections rely on local crafts, where *traditional values play an essential role*. These values shape their approach to crafts and intangible heritage in general. Their products must demonstrate artistic vision alongside technical excellence; they are handmade, contemporary, and unique. These objects are also expected to be innovative, *to place tradition in a contemporary context*, and to be both conceptual and functional. Therefore, in the Romanian context, KraftMade emphasise the need to recover traditional, place-specific wisdom, its practical knowledge, and ways of living in harmony with nature. KraftMade draw on local knowledge and abundance, investing in cooperation rather than competition. The initiative seeks to experience the absence of competitive dynamics and of various forms of boundaries. According to KraftMade, individuals are part of nature and live in harmony with it. This understanding of the natural environment and the world gives rise to particular ways of life, in which the empowerment of manual practice constitutes a central element of their lived philosophy (Matzal 2018).

Thus, their philosophy is articulated around the concepts of sustainability, responsible design, upcycling, and regeneration. This concept refers both to the regeneration of crafts and objects, as well as to the impact that such activities have on the local context. *Using the concept of upcycling, they propose creative and responsible product lines* aimed at lovers of design and good taste. The purposes of their work are regeneration and continuity, as they argue that there are concrete premises for designers and contemporary design to contribute to the transmission and continuity of traditional crafts, by incorporating them into products adapted to current contexts and needs.

Creators are considered visionaries for capitalising on traditional values. In the process of creation, identity is gained through traditions, folklore, and crafts—elements that define places and make them distinctive (Buică 2013; Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015; cf. also Comunian and England 2018). Reinterpreting material heritage through contemporary design revitalises crafts and intangible heritage more broadly. Besides promoting the local as a value, other key values are creativity, originality, and innovation (Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015; The Institute 2017). As a conclusion, the designer incorporates traditional techniques and crafts into their practice, promoting the local, which distinguishes design products. Therefore, *the local provides a competitive advantage*—the local dimension in their creations is rooted in crafts and helps within a global competition for innovation and uniqueness (Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015). Therefore, KraftMade hope that the public will gradually adopt an increasingly responsible consumption of Romanian design, focused on the valorisation of intangible cultural heritage and its protection.

Creativity can play an essential role in the preservation and promotion of traditional techniques, fostering a dialogue between heritage and contemporary practices (Comunian and England 2018). One creative direction focuses on archaic materials and manufacturing techniques inspired by traditional crafts (such as hand woodworking and weaving), which are reinterpreted and revalued through contemporary production methods. Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth, as designers and craftspeople, produce objects using traditional woodworking and loom weaving, employing archaic working processes that incorporate personal traits and cultural characteristics for ethnic groups. Thus, the objects become the result of meaningful gestures. The past is revalorised and this reflection on the past is realised not so much through nostalgia, but rather through investment in the future. This leads to regeneration, resilience, and to meaningful local development.

KraftMade provide insights into slow design practices and processes by understanding, valorising, and promoting local and regional culture. They particularly explore and celebrate Transylvanian heritage and the ecology of place (The Institute 2017; Zeppelin 2018). Two different worlds – design and crafts – come together to produce objects that are primarily grounded in the logic of their place of origin and may embody symbols of a culture (Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015; Zeppelin 2018): objects through which the experimental process of making and the collaborative relationship between designer and artisan are highlighted (The Institute 2017).

Referring to their sources of inspiration, for instance, in 2017 KraftMade list the richness of Transylvanian mental landscapes, particularly the traditional costumes of the Roma community in Cincu, alongside those of other ethnic groups (i.e., Romanians, Hungarians, and Transylvanian Saxons). Sources of inspiration have derived also from the natural environment and from an understanding of local ethno-ecology (Matzal 2018). The produced objects have functionality in relation to local materials and can be used in various spaces (domestic or public, indoors or outdoors) (The Institute 2017). The past offers lessons in sustainability that are valuable for shaping environmentally sensitive futures for individuals and communities. Slow design processes that sustain or generate sustainability constitute a focus of KraftMade. This concept of slow design and culturally inspired design was first used on their social media in May 2016. Local resources are explored and employed, being transformed into experiences and emotions. They propose a sensorial approach to placemaking and preservation in order to ensure authenticity: “we immersed ourselves in the land to learn about placemaking and preservation, ingurgitated the DNA of the land to understand its soul and cultural and narrative making.”

Another main source of creation is the rhythm of rural life and local stories, which can serve as the basis for new products and new experiences. The KraftMade team analyses the foundations of Transylvanian Saxon aesthetic harmony and assesses the contemporary relevance of archaic ideas, natural materials, and the slow processes of design, production, and consumption. They explain the difference that sustainable practices can make. For instance, they promote approaches and processes that decelerate production in fashion design and textile making. According to Marlene Herberth, in Cincu, the future is grounded in perspectives of slow design and the circular economy. Local identity is examined within the contemporary global context. In a world shaped by globally imposed trends, where mass production and rapid consumption prevail, KraftMade explore local and community-based mechanisms of identity formation and supports cultural influences: “we breathe deeply and slow down towards a new rhythm that allows the soul of objects to be revealed.” In a nomadic and digital world, KraftMade draw attention to place and authenticity (Zeppelin 2018). They reveal the potential of craft practices for both individual and collective well-being. Community engagement entails being together, exploring, and sharing. This represents one dimension of the direct impact of the cultural events they organise.

The name of Cincu is emblematic for KraftMade, for their products and philosophy. They reinterpret the realities and resources of Cincu in their workshop, which represents both a professional and spiritual journey. For instance, Marlene Herberth produced textiles on traditional looms, contributing to the documentation of local history through heritage textiles originating from the private collections of KraftMade, locals, and museum institutions (e.g., the Interethnic Museum of the Hârtibaciu Valley). KraftMade members and collaborators explored the rural environment and nature in depth across its multiple dimensions, later creating works using materials collected from the natural surroundings, thereby configuring a form of interaction and co-creation reminiscent of a contemporary sewing and socialising circles (RO, *șezătoare*) (Matzal 2018). These processes reflect the principles of slow design thinking, being grounded in inspiration drawn from nature and local history, while also integrating an already established cultural narrative.

5. Objectives of KraftMade: Intangible Heritage and Local Development

The pillars of KraftMade are sustainable development initiatives for traditional crafts and Cincu village, consultancy and educational projects. Thus, the objectives of KraftMade operate on two levels: firstly, the preservation and transmission of heritage, and secondly, the contribution to local development.

Concerning heritage, the mission of KraftMade is *to rediscover and interpret heritage, to transform it, and to promote slow design products, processes, and their creators* (e.g., inviting artisans to creative workshops, where, under the guidance of designers involved in various projects, they produce contemporary design objects inspired by traditional ones, to be showcased to the public in Romania, across Europe and US through exhibitions). Thus, one first objective of KraftMade is *raising awareness and educating younger generations*, in an attempt to preserve traditional crafts from falling into obscurity and to motivate young people to learn production techniques. Their craft education and craft-based thinking are grounded in a learning environment that proposes immersive experiences within the place itself and across all processes of placemaking (Filip and Mihăilescu 2024). KraftMade have a contemporary and relevant voice that transcends borders in the field of education for professionals in authentic craft techniques (Matzal 2018). They propose highlighting the importance of revitalising intangible heritage and the potential for revaluing traditions and crafts through contemporary design (The Institute 2017). This objective is connected to their philosophy of reviving endangered techniques in Romania.

The revival process can be successful if it incorporates contemporary themes related to environment, design, and lifestyle, which can contribute to opening a dialogue with the public.

Secondly, KraftMade *give value to and help transfer products and processes to the contemporary design market*. Contemporary design objects are inspired by elements and techniques used in traditional crafts, produced by skilled artisans and inspired designers. The “recipe” used by KraftMade for their products is based on close collaboration between designers and craftspeople; thus, contemporary design is inspired by the cultural heritage of rural communities in Transylvania. Both artisans and designers complement each other and enrich their art (Buică 2013). KraftMade advocate for no borders between these fields, for cooperation and togetherness as core values (The Institute 2017). They propose an ecological and traditional process, mastering all stages of production, employing traditional techniques, and involving the local community (Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015). They encourage intercultural dialogues around sustainable design and generate interdisciplinary approaches. KraftMade demonstrate how innovation enables the preservation of traditional techniques (The Institute 2017). Thus, slow design is possible and celebrated by mixing traditional crafts and contemporary design.

Thirdly, their activities are rooted in Transylvanian craftsmanship, which they support and promote in order to *provide artisans with a platform for visibility and market access*. The platform functions as a mediator: an intermediary between the client and the artisan, providing an open platform that, in response to public input, undertakes to create, construct, and restore (i.e., design, carve, sew, embroider) various objects, employing techniques that have been consolidated and refined over hundreds of years of practice and intergenerational transmission. In this way, crafts are brought back to the forefront as a form of utility, rather than being regarded solely as artisanal production (Ghilduş and Diaconu 2015). Heritage should be preserved and reinterpreted in products for contemporary uses (McGrath 2019; cf. also Matzal 2018).

Fourthly, they also *advocate for slowing down the pace of consuming*. They aim to educate consumers and to valorise and reclaim craftsmanship as both a technical practice and a fully developed artistic form. Fifthly, by combining traditional crafts with contemporary artisanal products, KraftMade also undertake *research and archival work on the intangible heritage of Cincu* (e.g., traditional crafts related to weaving, spinning, and the processing of natural fibres). Finally, *they offer consultancy for professionals* (Matzal 2018). Efforts have been made to facilitate the training of apprentices. Craftsmanship thus can

continue to exist through the involvement of passionate individuals. They teach restoration skills, such as traditional carpentry, to local construction workers in order to preserve traditional techniques and, consequently, the community's extensive and culturally significant architectural heritage (McGrath 2019). Therefore, one of their key objectives is to reach a specific audience. Their target audience is composed of two categories: those they collaborate with and those who purchase their products, namely the producers and consumers of their slow design outputs. Working together to produce objects are artisans, product designers, architects, resident artists, postdoctoral academics, students of creative disciplines, and other professionals.

Concerning development, the local development strategy KraftMade propose is based on their philosophy of sustainable development and eco-friendly lifestyles. Craftsmanship, through the wisdom accumulated and preserved over time, offers relevant contemporary solutions to the challenges generated by modern ways of life. Its integration into contemporary Romanian design also represents one of the few means by which craft techniques can be rescued from oblivion and allowed to persist in practice. This triggers a shift. One pathway to local development is a transformation in lifestyles and in the valorisation of heritage skills and natural resources (Matzal 2018). Designers can demonstrate that the slow design process is beneficial, constituting an effective and sustainable strategy that has been validated and refined over centuries. It contributes to the development of a circular economy based on small-scale workshops in which crafts are practiced at an exemplary level of excellence.

KraftMade point out that the production and commercialisation of utilitarian objects with contemporary design can update and enhance the development potential of the community. Moreover, the revitalisation of crafts in rural areas is considered one of the most effective strategies for individual and community resilience (Zeppelin 2018; cf. also Havadi et al. 2017; Ilovan et al. 2016). Regeneration is understood as a process grounded in creativity and the reinterpretation of traditions, facilitated by local initiatives embedded in rural spaces and communities, and oriented toward the exchange of practices and knowledge. Transylvania is a suitable environment for slow design, the reenactment of rituals, and ancient practices that revitalise the village without destroying its authenticity (Matzal 2018).

As early as 2013, gifts in the form of original and innovative products were available for purchase on the KraftMade website. Design is what enables them to keep pace with contemporary developments. For instance, a Christmas offer was available for purchase in shops in Bucharest and Graz. Gifts could be

selected and then produced according to the size specified by the client. In 2015, KraftMade highlighted the contribution their clients made to the development of the local economy, through the purchase of customisable objects subsequently produced by local artisans. Thus, buyers made a difference by providing employment opportunities to talented individuals with limited access to the labour market: each product sold generated direct income for the artisans involved in its production (The Institute 2017). Also, in 2016, KraftMade also functioned as a distribution network, playing a significant role in supporting local crafts, fair trade, and the local economy. Through the safeguarding and promotion of artisans, the local identity of Cincu is strengthened and a vulnerable social fabric can be stabilised (Ghilduș and Diaconu 2015).

In 2017, they announced that they intended to produce accessories locally, while also engaging in discussions with international artists regarding the funding of part of their association's projects dedicated to the promotion of intangible cultural heritage. In 2025, they advanced the idea that a whole village was needed for cultural work involving design, craft, and community. In addition, they argued that good practices derived from creative traditions could contribute to defining Romania's country brand. Considering its long-term impact, KraftMade argue that, through the valorisation of traditional crafts, Romanian design can acquire distinct identity (Buică 2013). Artisans and designers they previously worked with have remained in contact, especially due to social media platforms; they are aware of each other's projects, which enables continued collaboration (Buică 2013). The conclusion they reached was that there was hope for the preservation of Transylvanian heritage.

KraftMade also appears as a social economy enterprise, based on the revaluation of traditional occupations through small-scale businesses that encourage artisans to produce and commercialise goods made from local raw materials. Alongside financial incentives, this approach facilitates the preservation of traditions, local and regional identity, and the enhancement of cultural diversity (Ghilduș and Diaconu 2015).

The impact also lies in long-term transfer made possible as KraftMade were able to develop an applied method structured into specific stages of the design thinking process, which could be used across various contexts and fields of activity. This became possible after an in-depth study of local culture, conducted with humility and respect, including toward the people involved. KraftMade illustrate how traditional techniques and local materials can be recontextualised within conceptual art, constructing a sensory and evocative narrative of place identity in an abstracted and replicable form. The impact has

been tangible, as it has opened new channels of communication, production, and commercialisation (Matzal 2018).

One desired impact on local development is that the new situation may provide the necessary conditions for people to remain in the country and in the rural area, without being compelled to emigrate. Through the work carried out by KraftMade, including daily discussions with both elderly and young residents, they aim to demonstrate that heritage, knowledge, and skills are valuable. Personal and local pride are restored among villagers, who remain closely connected to nature, to the land. These forms of knowledge are further valued and sustained through family-based initiatives (Matzal 2018).

Memory and community together restore vitality to the village. Cincu is presented as undergoing revitalisation, heritagisation, and cultural revival, while trying to avoid rural gentrification (Zeppelin 2018). It is an issue that constantly concerns KraftMade: the preservation of an authentic local identity and the avoidance of mass tourism development. According to Marlene Herberth, those who arrive generally demonstrate attention to the restoration of dwellings, placing particular emphasis on detail, so that numerous buildings—including historic monuments in an advanced state of deterioration—are gradually brought back to life, revealing a rich cultural heritage that is being reconfigured in contemporary forms. At the same time, KraftMade support the integration of newcomers into an understanding and appreciation of the culture and spirit of the place, through expertise, consultancy, restoration work, and various interdisciplinary collaborations. However, in parallel, the difficulty of identifying local apprentices persists (Matzal 2018).

Initiatives that combine heritage preservation with the promotion of local development include the following two: the revitalised Transylvanian Saxon tradition of *Fuga Lolelor / Urzelnlaufen*, a yearly carnival and ritual, and *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress*.

One of their most recent and most prominently promoted activities is the Transylvanian Saxon custom, *Fuga Lolelor / Urzelnlaufen / The Run of the Lole*. This is a seasonal traditional performance at the end of January or beginning of February. The role of the *Lole* is, in addition to driving away winter and evil spirits, to guard the transfer of the guild chest containing the money and professional secrets of the craft guilds from one guild master to another. While chasing away malevolent spirits from Cincu in Transylvania, this ancient Transylvanian Saxon custom intends to bring the blessings of spring and good spirits into people's homes and inner lives. Wearing masks and costumes, participants symbolically drive away evil spirits during one of the oldest Saxon rituals in Transylvania, with origins in the Middle Ages.

The practice is mentioned in guild archives starting with 1689. It involved the organisation of a procession accompanying the guild chest, guarded by the Lole—figures rooted in pre-Christian beliefs, to whom symbolic roles of protection and purification are attributed. These masked figures have a frightening appearance, wearing costumes made of black rags and grotesque masks that conceal the wearer's identity, as well as decorative elements such as devil tails, crafted from braided hemp. Contemporary art contributes to the making of the costumes, with wearable artefacts serving as expressions of cultural identity. These characters produce a deafening sound through the bells attached to their waists and the braided Transylvanian Saxon leather whips, made according to traditional craft preserved over hundreds of years (Igloo 2013).

Urzelmlaufen in Cincu was re-enacted again on 28 January 2017, after a break of more than a decade. In Cincu, the street procession of the Lole is led by an allegorical tractor carrying the “Court of Fools.” This group stages a symbolic trial, in which satirical episodes from the lives of residents throughout the year are evoked. One of the songs performed by the Court of Fools states that such a beautiful day should never come to an end. The Transylvanian Saxon custom unfolds through the streets of the village, where Transylvanians of all ages and ethnic backgrounds come together. Villagers welcome the Lole with freshly made doughnuts and fruit brandy, as gestures of hospitality and gratitude for both prosperity and communal purification brought about by the ritual. Participants (locals and tourists) laugh with and about the villagers, and after symbolically driving away the village's “demons,” the ritual continues as a collective festive performance. The event is a community initiative involving local contributors, including Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth, and organisations such as Soxen Association and KraftMade, supported by the Cincu Municipality, Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation, and local sponsors. The duration of the event is approximately six hours (Filip and Mihăilescu 2024).

Marlene Herberth underlines that although the Transylvanian Saxon population has emigrated abroad, the continuity of the tradition has been preserved, and the identity of those who wear the masks has become secondary. The Transylvanian Saxon custom is now performed by other ethnic groups, and the goal is that the new performers respect the ancient ritual. This tradition represents a key element of local identity, emerging from a specific cultural context. The reenactment of place-based customs functions as a way of celebrating local culture. According to information from interviews conducted and published in 2018, this tradition is performed annually by more

than 300 masked characters in two other settlements (Agnita and Sibiu), and by approximately 100 in Cincu, constituting arguably the most spectacular event of the local community and currently reaffirming itself as the true spirit of the place (Filip and Mihăilescu 2024; Matzal 2018).

Moreover, in 2019, Marlene Herberth announces that thanks to the great work of the Cincu community, *The Cincu Urzeln* had been selected to participate in the EU-funded RURITAGE programme (Horizon 2020), an initiative focused on heritage-led rural regeneration. The objective was to develop a long-term, meaningful vision for the village that placed cultural roots, diversity, heritage, and authenticity at its core, while also prioritising local development through a coherent strategic framework. RURITAGE supported communities in leveraging their unique assets by promoting innovation in areas such as resilience, landscape management, local food systems, and cultural festivals. Within this context, Cincu's contribution focused on exploring how cultural and natural heritage could be mobilised for rural regeneration and sustainable development, as well as on raising awareness regarding the transferability of its practices to other rural contexts yearly. People contribute through a range of activities, including cooking, photography, singing, dancing, costume-making, prop construction, poetry writing, and performance (Filip and Mihăilescu 2024). The ritual *Fuga Lolelor* is a sensory spectacle (Filip and Mihăilescu 2024). In addition, in 2024, the programme included exhibition visits accompanied by guided tours. Visitors were given the opportunity to learn how to crack a whip.

In the same vein, in Cincu, initiatives aimed at valorising tangible and intangible heritage have been set in motion, continuing the process of recovering local history through the museum *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress*. The museum is housed in a building constructed within the defensive walls of the church (1520), which served as the first town hall of Cincu until 1714. Starting with the 2024, a new stage was initiated in capitalising on local identity and heritage due to *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress*, a project of the Soxen Association (led by Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth) with the *Fuga Lolelor Cincu/Großschenker Urzellauf Village Association*. Accomplished through the effort of the community (locals, neighbours, Transylvanian Saxons, friends, partners, funders, artists of all ages contributed), *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress* is a history, culture, and art platform. *Carnivalesque* was their first exhibition which also inaugurated the space of the museum on the 10th of February 2024. In the same year, a workshop also took place at the museum; on this occasion, ten high school students from the Land of Făgăraş created a collaborative and interactive sound installation reflecting

the *Fuga Lolelor / Urzelnlaufen* tradition, conveying the spirit and symbolic significance of the Lole figures. The installation was subsequently exhibited. The museum is conceived as a community space: “a living room for the community, a home for kids and teenagers, a place of doing things together.” For instance, besides exhibitions (e.g., *The Masquerade* exhibition), they organise contemporary or “different” social gatherings (or sewing circles), where they explore heritage, culture and togetherness. People could also participate in a full-day programme combining textiles and cinema at the museum.

The museum serves as a tribute to the past, documenting both heritage and more recent history, while also showcasing contemporary artists and community artefacts produced by local craft guilds dating back to 1681. It is a work in progress, as objects are continuously added to the permanent exhibition based on ongoing discoveries in the village of Cincu. In addition, the history of the *Urzelnlaufen / Fuga Lolelor* tradition and of local crafts is presented within the museum. It holds significant historical value for Cincu, as it reveals and contextualises the contents of the shoemakers’ guild chest, which includes valuable documents dating back to 1570. The museum also illustrates the complexity of craft learning, tools, and skills through a reconstructed shoemakers’ workshop originally from Cincu, based on the research of Alex Herberth. Special activities mark various events; for instance, the *Rural Museum Night* offers a guided tour accompanied by a charitable brunch, during which the Cincu community prepares seasonal local delicacies, alongside a whip-cracking workshop, visits to the local fortified church, and encounters with local weaving and textile artisans. According to Marlene Herberth, the preservation of Cincu’s heritage requires the active involvement of the entire community. Contemporary artists contribute, through works specifically created for the *Fuga Lolelor* in Cincu, to framing and interpreting local history and archival material. The exhibited objects are contextualised within the cultural legacy of the craft guilds, which once played a central role in community life and to which the *Fuga Lolelor* tradition is closely connected. Together, these elements celebrate the richness of both local and Transylvanian cultural heritage. Advancing local culture—reflected in customs and intangible craft heritage—requires the collective engagement of the entire village in order to revive community spirit and a sense of belonging (cf. Council of Europe 2005, 2017; European Commission 2018; Havadi-Nagy et al. 2017; Ilovan et al. 2016). To conclude, KraftMade and their collaborators contribute to the reconstruction of cultural life in the village of Cincu. Traditions are being performed and (re)created in alignment with the authentic local character.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The KraftMade project, initiated in the village of Cincu, Braşov County, Romania, was presented as a case study. This provides a comprehensive understanding of grassroots' objectives, the processes members support, and their role as cultural mediators and enablers of local development in a rural context. KraftMade's objectives integrate environmental, cultural, and social perspectives on what is fair, sustainable, and contextually appropriate, and more broadly, on regenerative outcomes. They provide both practical and conceptual guidance for those interested in crafts and rural heritage. Their regenerative thinking is flexible and inclusive, enabling the participation of diverse communities and places, and thereby supporting its transferability.

Marlene Herberth and Alex Herberth are community members and professionals, assuming leadership roles at the local level through both discourse and practice. Together with a range of collaborators (individuals and institutions), they work towards regenerative aspirations for the field of crafts and for the village of Cincu. Taken together, these elements open up new possibilities for artisans and for Cincu, while also adding depth to the narratives they construct about the people and places involved in processes of learning and community building. The members of KraftMade consciously shape both the present they inhabit and the future of the village. Their discourse and practices demonstrate their agency and empowerment in influencing and narrating the village's trajectory. Operating from positions of local leadership, they emphasise that grassroots initiatives can envision change and generate tangible impact.

The KraftMade case study is guided by an aspirational objective of generating positive change through the revival of traditional knowledge and crafts, the facilitation of cooperation between artisans and designers, *and the intergenerational transfer of skills and expertise*. In this way, younger generations are less compelled to leave rural areas in search of livelihoods elsewhere, according to the initiative's founder, Marlene Herberth. By representing KraftMade and continuously documenting its initiatives and activities online, she assumes a position of leadership, including practically, within the cultural life of the village of Cincu. First, KraftMade contribute to constructing and articulating a vision of a regenerative future for Cincu. According to Marlene Herberth, nature provides guidance for human life, and the places of Cincu possess a "soul" or "DNA." Art generates experiences that connect people to places and their uniqueness, fostering a sense of belonging either to Cincu or, more broadly, to the overarching understanding of being part of nature.

In the case of Cincu and the KraftMade initiative, regeneration refers both to crafts and to the social and cultural life of the village. Marlene Herberth's conceptual approach to the revival of craft practices and the cultural life of the rural community in Cincu is implemented through transformative initiatives (e.g., workshops, exhibitions, festivals, and a village museum) that are context-specific and therefore adapted to the local conditions of Cincu.

Considering the key features of regenerative approaches at the local level (Camrass 2023: 91), KraftMade align with these both in their philosophy and practice. These features include goals, roots and informing background, views of reality, conceptions of time, characteristics, and modes of measurement. With regard to goals, regenerative approaches seek to “offer net positive, enduring contribution and value, build social and natural capital, achieve co-evolutionary and patterned relationships between systems” (Camrass 2023: 91). In the same vein, KraftMade advocate that the artefacts they create or restore combine the history of place with that of nature. Marlene Herberth thus underlines that KraftMade engage in what Camrass (2023: 96) terms “organic conversations” with nature and people alike, as well as with the built environment and the knowledge systems that shaped it.

KraftMade connect present actions to a *future-oriented vision* in which crafts and the village itself become sufficiently attractive for residents, so that younger people choose to remain rather than leave Cincu in search of better opportunities elsewhere. In this way, personal and collective worldviews intertwine to generate regeneration and resilience in Cincu. They underpin visions of a future in which crafts and togetherness—both within the village community and in relation to nature—are operationalised for local development (cf. Roders and Oers 2011; Sacco 2014; Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013).

KraftMade members valorise the uniqueness of Cincu and highlight *the necessity of building a future based on the co-evolution of people and the natural environment*, a key principle and essential condition of any regenerative practice (Camrass 2023: 95), grounded in a balanced and interconnected whole. They also underline the importance of cooperation, participation, and togetherness as prerequisites for long-term regenerative action. KraftMade exemplify a possible pathway for envisioning a regenerative future for Cincu, demonstrating a progression from individual agency in shaping development to the broader social capacity of the village community (cf. Slaughter 1996). The future-oriented potential of their current thinking is made accessible to others through the discourse and practices of KraftMade, as documented on their Facebook and Instagram accounts as well as in published mass media

interviews. In this way, their work responds simultaneously to both crises and developmental opportunities across multiple spatial scales (local, regional, and national) (cf. Wahl 2016).

The second feature of regenerative approaches concerns their *underlying theoretical background*. Similarly, KraftMade draw on ecological and living systems theories, alongside its primary cultural orientation. Harmony with nature constitutes a central element of both its discourse and practice. The initiative also engages with ethno-ecological perspectives, which emphasise the strong interconnections between natural environments and traditions, illustrating how human communities adapt to place in a sustainable manner in order to ensure survival in both practical and creative ways (Comunian and England 2018; Matzal 2018; Roders and Oers 2011; Sacco 2014; Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013; Zeppelin 2018). This is how local identity is constructed. According to KraftMade, *culturally grounded slow design practices* offer a pathway toward regenerative, resilient, and sustainable futures (Matzal 2018). For example, textile art and woodwork are fields that KraftMade develop by combining old and new traditions through processes of recycling and upcycling, thereby enabling sustainable lifestyle choices and contributing to local development (Matzal 2018). In 2017, Marlene Herberth refers to her work documenting diverse crafts within the framework of the nationwide KraftMade research, highlighting her growing interest in vernacular textiles due to their capacity to convey narratives, reactivate memory, and fulfil everyday functions. From this perspective, upcycling practices—namely the reuse of household textile waste to create new materials—have been and continue to be a recurring phenomenon across cultures. In this context, sustainability in cultural production is defined through the principles of reducing consumption, reusing, and repairing the resources engaged in the creative process. Regenerative sustainability can be advanced through futures-oriented conceptual models that provide alternative perspectives on, and approaches to, human–environment relationships and, consequently, on the impacts of human behaviour (Camrass 2020). The theoretical framework of regenerative futures entails both individual and collective commitment and transformation, which KraftMade actively advocate.

In this process, solutions are context-specific, and engagement with the local environment provides KraftMade with the necessary elements to identify future pathways for action, alongside the guidance offered by their overarching philosophy. KraftMade exemplify the sustainable use of resources in the creation of its products, with reduced impact and damage to the natural environment. The initiative advocates for a cultural shift away from current

unsustainable production and consumption models toward a systemic approach that involves working with the environment and understanding human–environment relationships in an integrated manner, as part of a holistic living system (Reed 2007). Previous research has shown that an integrated understanding of living systems is possible through a place-based approach, as such systems are inherently adapted to sustaining mutually beneficial and regenerative relationships within each specific context (Reed 2007).

The third feature of the regenerative futures approach concerns *the view of reality grounded in nested systems* (systems within systems and a web of interdependencies), ecological principles, and sustainability. KraftMade develop a similar understanding of reality, in which multiple spatial scales influence one another, and where a balanced relationship with nature, alongside the valorisation of cultural identity, can support a transition from conditions of loss—of hope and human resources—towards resilience and sustainable, regenerative futures (Roders and Oers 2011; Sacco 2014; Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013). The idea that “it takes a whole village” to accomplish meaningful outcomes has re-emerged in recent discourse and is grounded in whole systems theory (cf. Camrass 2023: 91). Understanding the local context therefore requires attention to the interconnections between its constituent parts, with all elements being relevant to the implementation of change. KraftMade similarly propose that transformation emerges from a collective process, in which the entire village works towards a shared vision of the future. Since 2022, they have characterised artists as individuals capable of bringing people together and fostering communities through their artistic practice. KraftMade articulate a higher purpose: a dialogue is open on how they envision the future should take shape. This also extends to vernacular architecture through the contribution of Alex Herberth. He underlines regenerative thinking and ecological balance in his work, thereby contributing to KraftMade’s broader philosophy concerning people’s lifestyle choices and everyday practices.

The fourth feature of regenerative approaches concerns *particular conceptions of time, especially the consideration of “social and ecological factors across temporal scales”* (Camrass 2023: 91). KraftMade similarly articulate a temporal perspective that spans multiple scales by continuously linking present practices to past craft traditions, both in the use of appropriate natural and human resources and in the application of skills to produce high-quality, sustainable objects that respect both ecological systems and human needs. For this reason, KraftMade repeatedly draw on traditional knowledge as a foundational reference for practices deemed to be appropriately grounded and sustainable.

KraftMade situate their actions within a broad temporal framework and also move beyond an anthropocentric bias by emphasising living in harmony with nature—a worldview they argue is embedded in traditional local craft practices. Marlene Herberth underlines that she is part of an action-learning process, attentively engaging with people and places, heritage and nature in a conscious and respectful manner, with modesty, and adopting an inclusive perspective that encompasses both human and non-human dimensions (cf. also Camrass 2023: 94). This approach enables her to understand the evolving story of crafts and of Cincu across multiple historical periods, including planning for the future.

Other features of regenerative approaches include *the intentional effort to uncover the story of the place* from both social and ecological perspectives, as well as *the primacy of process over outcomes*, although results remain important. Across their social media posts and interviews published in newspapers and magazines over the years, KraftMade’s sustained efforts are evident in their attempt to reveal the layered story of Cincu and to highlight the strong interconnections between past, present, and future. This is particularly articulated through the revival of nature, traditional crafts, and old rituals. The development of “a story of place” is fundamental to the initiation of any regenerative process (Camrass 2023: 94). Accordingly, heritage is not only preserved but also consciously transformed, valorised, and leveraged to enhance community resilience and regeneration (cf. Roders and Oers 2011) through a grassroots initiative.

KraftMade draw on the story of Cincu to support their regenerative practice. This narrative provides a temporally layered understanding of local reality, aligning with a key principle of regenerative approaches: “regenerative practice starts with a story of place” (cf. Camrass 2023: 93). Accordingly, regenerative futures thinking can be identified in the initiatives supported by KraftMade, insofar as “a story of place can be deepened by examining the systems, worldviews and myth/metaphors that support them” (Camrass 2023: 93). KraftMade thus explore both past and present, as well as human and non-human dimensions, within the evolving story of Cincu. One initiative representative of this work is *Fuga Lolelor Cincu. Museum in Progress*. Through this initiative, they not only deepen the story of Cincu but also introduce a futures-oriented perspective to it. The “museum in progress” concept frames heritage as an evolving process, transforming it into experiential practices that can foster a stronger sense of belonging among individuals and within the village community. It also contributes to a sense of self-worth, arising from participation in these activities, as well as to local pride (cf. Council of Europe

2005, 2017; European Commission 2018). The museum incorporates multiple perspectives on Cincu and its ongoing narrative, to which the museum itself actively contributes. It encourages reflection on the past alongside present-day practices that integrate traditional wisdom, knowledge, and skills.

Moreover, with regard to the final feature of regenerative approaches—namely *the emphasis on process and impact rather than solely on outcomes*—KraftMade can also be situated within this orientation. The initiative consistently advocates for sustainability and for the values embedded in its various activities, which confer what they describe as “power to the hands.” This notion highlights the motivating and empowering conditions that sustain artisan practice and support the revitalisation of crafts. In this way, values, stories of place, traditional knowledge, and culture become productive resources that contribute to local resilience and further development. Therefore, the KraftMade case study, and implicitly that of Cincu, is characterised by regenerative aspirations. In addition to its cultural work, as presented in this article, this initiative has enabled the implementation of regenerative thinking and practice within the Cincu community. Over its relatively short existence (from 2013 to the present), KraftMade members and collaborators have developed a leadership discourse in relation to the village of Cincu, extending beyond culture and, in particular, beyond local crafts and heritage. However, it may still be too early to adequately assess its impact.

The recovery of local identity through intangible heritage can also be understood as a form of activism. The recent past has been marked by political, economic, technological, and social transformations across all spatial scales. In this context, KraftMade emphasise the importance of engaging with the rural spirit, the Transylvanian cultural DNA of the village of Cincu, and the region’s rich craft heritage. They have identified sustainable solutions grounded in the use and creative reuse of local resources, driven by an intention to expose an industry that is excessively polluting and inequitable (Zeppelin 2018). KraftMade emphasise that individuals and collectives bear responsibility for addressing pressing environmental challenges at local, regional, and global scales. Within this framework, responsible art is informed by sustainable practices from the past, which serve to shape and construct regenerative futures. Such a perspective has implications for small communities (Council of Europe 2005, 2017; European Commission 2018; Roders and Oers 2011; Sacco 2014; Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013).

To conclude, KraftMade members and collaborators are committed to aligning individual selves with shared values. These values, emphasised at the beginning of the 2020s, include excellence in work, universality, kindness,

forgiveness, and togetherness, thereby enabling them to remain authentic both to their own principles and to those shared by the local community in which they live. Change is understood as tradition-based innovation, encompassing practices and products that are attentive to local communities and the environment, and that respect both tangible and intangible dimensions of place (Vecco 2010). KraftMade's engagement with change is grounded in both theory and practice. Resource efficiency should characterise the co-evolution of natural and human systems, as these are understood as nested and interdependent (Camrass 2020, 2023). The regenerative future for Cincu is informed by an ecologically oriented worldview (Camrass 2023: 97), in which responsible choices are recognised as having long-term consequences. KraftMade emphasise these ideas in their discourse. In this way, the narrative they construct around crafts and place is empowering for the rural community of Cincu and beyond.

Summing up, the alignment of KraftMade's discourse and practice with the features of regenerative futures indicates that they are part of a broader cultural movement, and that their actions resonate beyond the village of Cincu, with relevance to other contexts and thus one can identify a degree of transferability, particularly in settings where heritage is preserved and transformed to support resilient communities (cf. Council of Europe 2005, 2017; European Commission 2018). Time will ultimately show whether this approach constitutes a sustainable model for responsible craft preservation, for intangible heritage in general, and local development—an approach that bridges the gap between past and present.

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