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Future for Religious Heritage

Mad'in Europe

The Fragile Future of Craft Professions in Built Heritage

A recently published 'Study on the Situation of Craft Professions Involved in Safeguarding Built Heritage' identifies serious threats to the survival of built heritage craftsmanship.

Access the full REPORT

PRESS RELEASE
NOVEMBER 2024, BRUSSELS

"I find that your study is very relevant because it is getting more and more difficult to find specialised craft professionals in individual countries all over Europe."

– Architect (Denmark)

For centuries, craft professionals have ensured the preservation of historic buildings, keeping them in good condition. However, the continuity of centuries-old craftsmanship must face several major threats.

The **'Study on the Situation of Craft Professions Involved in Safeguarding Built Heritage'**. published by **Mad'in Europe (MDE)** and **Future for Religious Heritage (FRH)** explores critical issues such as the education and certification of craftspeople, the professional challenges they face in today's digitised and globalised scenario, and the transmission of these essential skills to younger generations.

This document is the result of a **survey launched during the European Year of Skills 2023/24** by both organisations to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation of heritage crafts in terms of **education, certification, practice and transmission to new generations**. The survey targeted three main groups: craft professionals working in the context of built heritage; architects, conservators and owners of heritage buildings; and educational institutions offering craft training.

The key findings of the study were presented on 20 September in an online event as part of the **Creative Skills Week 2024**, with the participation of four professionals with extensive knowledge of crafts, built heritage and education: Georgia Cristea, Panos Kostoulas, Rodolphe de Looz-Corswarem and Dominic Taylor.

The picture painted by the survey results points to an ageing workforce, a lack of clear strategies for craftspeople to pass on their know-how and workshops to new generations, and wide disparities in certification systems across Europe. Additionally, insufficient support for improving marketing capacities and digital skills training, as well as limited pathways for young people to enter the craft sector, further complicate the situation.

- **An ageing sector without a clear transmission strategy**

  One of the most worrying findings of the study is that craft professionals are ageing while a few young people are arriving. The study found an ageing workforce (**56.3% of the respondents were over 50 years old**), with many artisans nearing retirement and a lack of clear strategies for passing down their knowledge and workshops to new generations (**55.29% of respondents over the age of 50 are unsure about the future of their business after retirement**).

  This poses a potential threat to the survival of these often centuries-old professions, as well as Europe's cultural heritage, which depends on the skills and knowledge of skilled craftsmen.

- **Certification and cross-border careers**

  The study identified wide disparities in certification systems across Europe. The need for professional certificates or accreditation, the way of obtaining them and their validity for working internationally varies from country to country.

  In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, the absence of a standardised certification system makes it difficult for students and employers to measure the value of qualifications, and complicate international collaborations and mobility. This also restricts the flow of expertise and hinders the exchange of good practices.

- **Keeping up with the digital transition**

  With the rise of new technologies and digital platforms, it is crucial for artisans to integrate digital tools and skills into their practice to remain competitive.

  The study shows that, although **90% of respondents acknowledge the potential of digital tools for business**, there is a gap in digital literacy, **with 64% of respondents reporting insufficient support for improving marketing capacities and digital skills training within the craft sector**.

  The lack of specific training programmes or resources (**51.9% of educational centres and schools do not offer marketing and communication skills** and 25.9% offer them on an optional basis), or lack of time of craftspeople, often hampers their ability to take full advantage of online presence and digital tools for growth.

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What can be done to ensure the survival of heritage crafts?

The study identifies a series of opportunities to guarantee the survival of craftmanship and proposes a set of actions to ensure their future.

1. **Standardising craft certifications** to enhance the sector's credibility, ensure consistent quality, and facilitate international mobility for crafts professionals.
2. **Integrating digital skills, marketing, and entrepreneurship training into craft education programmes** to make sure that traditional crafts stay up to market demands and dynamic in a digital era.
3. **More support for mentorship and apprenticeship programmes** to enable the transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced practitioners to younger generations, ensuring the survival of small craft businesses.
4. **Enhancing cross-sectoral collaborations** among crafts professionals, architects, heritage curators and public entities (who often operate within closed circles) to discover new talent and innovative solutions.
5. **Public awareness campaigns and advocacy** efforts targeting policymakers, educators, and the European society as a whole are crucial to understanding the cultural significance of crafts, attracting greater investment and fostering policies that support the growth and sustainability of crafts.

Note for editors

Mad'in Europe gives support to European professionals in crafts and heritage conservation and valorises the transmission of skills to next generations through formal and non-formal education. Its activities are empowered by the collaboration with other European stakeholders. https://www.madineurope.eu/en/

Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) is a European network representing more than 80 organisations and over 120 professionals working for the safeguarding and promotion of historic places of worship. Raising awareness about heritage crafts and supporting their preservation is essential to us as the future of religious heritage is closely linked to them. https://www.frh-europe.org/

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