



Historic Crafts of Monasteries and their Social Entrepreneurship Potential

Authors:

Karin Drda-Kühn,
media k GmbH (main editor)

*Pantelis Balaouras, Constantinos
Tsibanis (Greek Universities Network)*

*Wolfgang Kniejski, Angela Ivanova
(INI-Novation Bulgaria)*

*Wolfgang Eisenreich
(Wissenschaftsinitiative
Niederösterreich)*

*Lilian Grootswagers, Jordi Mallarach
(Future for Religious Heritage)*

*Matthias Wagner
(Kloster Bronnbach)*



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1. Foreword

This publication closes the circle of materials developed by the **SKIVRE** project team to harness the great potential of monastic products. The aim is to motivate and inspire both operators of and employees in monastery shops and the responsible business people in monasteries and religious communities to better market the high quality and ethical integrity of monastic products and to transfer this into economic and communicative success. The training modules, the implementation handbook and the digital learning platform are a unique training package which will hopefully be used by as many European monasteries as possible.

As the advisory board of the **SKIVRE** project, we followed the project for more than two years and continuously reviewed the developed materials and - where necessary - formulated recommendations. In this publication the **SKIVRE** team goes far beyond the actual training horizon by showing the economic potential of monastic products based on historical craftsmanship. Most monastic products are based on the tradition and ethos of monastic craftsmanship and continue this in their products as well as in the basic attitude towards them. In many respects they correspond to current trends and requirements for purity, sustainability and responsible action. They also offer great opportunities for social entrepreneurship. This

publication sheds light on these trends and opportunities. The following chapters make it clear that monastic products can contribute to tourism, local and regional development and ultimately to stabilisation of jobs and job creation. This is an aspect that we would like explicitly to emphasise.

We hope that this publication will have the widest possible readership, especially among those responsible in religious orders and spiritual communities. Monasteries and their products are a unique European resource and deserve to be supported and promoted as widely as *possible*.

Stefan Beier / Kloster Lehnin / Germany

Sotirios Despotis / National and Kapodistrian University of Athens / Greece

Boris Dimitrov / CheckPoint Cardio OOD, Kazanlak / Bulgaria

Martin Erdmann, Klosterland e.V., Berlin / Germany

Jan Jaspers / Centrum voor Religieuze Kunst en Cultuur vzw, Leuven / Belgium

2. A warm welcome to SKIVRE!



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In this publication, the **SKIVRE** team would like to take you on an exciting journey to Christian and Orthodox monasteries, to monks, nuns, and their employees, who produce, develop, and market products using the knowledge of centuries, refined and made available to today's society. It will not only be part of a journey into the past – you will be amazed at how up-to-date and fashionable monastic products are. These products include beverages, food, personal care products, clothing, and daily supplies.

Step by step and especially when reading more than the 30 good examples that we have captured for the training sessions, we became aware of the quality, high standards, and current values such as purity, sustainability, and responsibility contained in these products. Above all, it is astonishing how much monastic products meet today's demands for healthy foods, proven remedies without chemical additives, sustainable durability of materials used, and also aesthetics. We were amazed at how monks and nuns who make their products by hand, with love and devotion, integrate them into a spiritual context. This was never a romantic

journey into the past, but always an examination and appreciation of the products and their high quality.

But let's not fool ourselves: monastic products are niche products, even if individual products such as beer, wine, or oil can serve a large market in the quantities of production. The focus of our research was on products which are produced in comparatively small quantities and with a great deal of manual effort. We would like to give these products a chance in the market through improved marketing and professional, up-to-date communications. In doing so, we are aware that the low production figures can only address a small number of customers. Therefore, it is all the more important to show what is special about monastic products and where their values are unrivalled.

A **SKIVRE** survey from 2019 showed that the operators of monasteries are very open to what training can offer them, namely improved knowledge for market access. Of course, we know that it is very difficult for communities of monks and nuns, who are often elderly, to fulfil their religious duties with the demands for the development and distribution of monastic products. However, we experienced many inspiring and motivating examples during our study visits, which make us generally optimistic overall.

Who is this publication addressed to? The target groups are representatives of European monasteries, employment agencies, business developers, tourist agencies, companies in rural areas interested in new business fields based on monastic products, and the public at large. This seems to be a very broad and little focused field. First of all, this publication is directed primarily not at monks, nuns and staff in monasteries themselves, but to all those who operate in the social and economic environment surrounding the monasteries. We would like to appeal to those interested in this area to inspire them to see monasteries as 'drivers' of local and regional development, and importantly catalysts for innovative entrepreneurial commitment.

We wish you an exciting and fruitful read! Of course, we, as a team, welcome your ideas and suggestions, because we will all continue to work – both professionally and privately – for opportunities that will help to preserve our European monasteries and their outstanding products.

*The **SKIVRE** team*

Pantelis Balaouras, Karin Drda-Kühn, Lilian Grootswagers, Angela Ivanova, Wolfgang Kniejski, Jordi Mallarach, Sabrina Rota, Constantinos Tsibanis, Matthias Wagner

3. Historic crafts and monastic products – market and buyers



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3.1 Characteristics of an attractive market

The market for monastic products is growing: this is clearly documented in the more than [30 Good Practices](#) collected by **SKIVRE**, even if there are as yet no empirical data available. It ranges from small niche products such as the production of honey from a particular monastery to the million-dollar turnover for monastic beer. In the following, we will primarily focus on products that are handcrafted in the monasteries and have a historical and spiritual connection to the monastery. It is about comparatively low quantities and about products that have a sustainable value for the buyer.

The interest in monastic products is by no means only that of church-goers and those with a special connection to monastic spirituality. So where does the interest come from in what monks and nuns have brewed, prepared and cultivated for centuries? Is it really "black-green

sustainability dreams"¹ and a "globalisation-critical, anti-modernist attitude" that makes the chic inhabitants of the old building quarters in German cities, for example, enjoy monastery pea soup in search of the "true and good"? This was the assumption of the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, which attempted an analysis in 2017.²

Every market, every product addresses a potential user or buyer from wherever they are based, no matter whether he or she has a vital need or feels pleasure in an object. So the SKIVRE team had to identify more than just the specific buyers of monastic products. In addition, the experts involved found it very difficult to define a universal customer profile. The monastery shop [Monastiriakokelari](#) in Athens (one of **SKIVRE's** Good Practices) attracts both students and senior citizens who shop there - some in search of high-quality organic products, others in search of remedies that have a healing effect without chemical additives.

In the Bulgarian Orthodox monasteries like [Tturnogorski](#), it is primarily local and regional residents who buy food in the monastery shop and thus consciously wish to contribute to the preservation of the monasteries as spiritual and communal places. In the German [Bronnbach monastery](#), it is mainly visitors to a tourist region who take away monastic products, such as the monastery's own honey, as souvenirs. In the [Sicilian monastery of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria in Palermo](#) it is mainly the citizens of Palermo who stock up on the delicious sweets of the former monastery.

Monasteries that are active in production have noticed a growing interest in their products. Monastery shops have grown to encompass the new interest of increasing numbers of pilgrims, tourists and citizens that link monastic products to purity, quality, honesty, handicrafts and centuries-old traditions. Co-operatives for selling products for several monasteries or different orders emerged during the past few years and retail markets have become interested in monastic products as a new business field. It is tempting to believe that monastic products are becoming lifestyle products to enable customers to identify with a world beyond their own environment.

A compilation of different groups of customers has been created in **SKIVRE** training modules 3 ("[The Monastic Product](#)") and 4 ("[How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically](#)"), and descriptions of these groups can also be found in training module 6 on "[Communication and](#)

¹ The expression "black-green sustainability dreams" may not be immediately understandable outside a German context: it alludes to two German parties, the conservative Christian Democratic Union CDU ("black") and the environmentally oriented party "Bündnis 90/Die Grünen" ("green").

² Klask (2017)

[Social Media](#)" for monastic products. It is safe to say that these are people who "believe" in a monastic product, even if for very different reasons:

- People influenced by Christianity, who find spirituality in monastic products
- Old people who trust monastic medicine more than conventional medicine
- Parents for whom certain quality standards are important for the welfare of their children
- Quality-conscious enthusiasts from middle-class urban areas
- Young people looking for alternatives to current products in terms of the conservation of resources, sustainability, climate awareness, etc.

So where exactly is the common ground that makes monastic products attractive for these different people?

3.2 Monastic craft products and the search for meaning, purpose and purity

Since the Middle Ages, monasteries have been places where people could find confidence and strength in their faith, where knowledge was recorded and passed on, and where innovation (in technologies and techniques) was firmly nurtured. It is not without historical basis that European monastic libraries are considered "knowledge repositories" for viticulture, fruit and vegetable growing, for remedies and medicines, personal care products that facilitate pilgrimages, and materials designed for longevity. In this way, a product that has been produced for centuries in the same or similar form has a "seal of quality" that no other can compete with.

SKIVRE was dedicated to all those products that Martin Erdmann has described as "secular": "For it is the secular products, at the interface between monastery and the outside world", that one must pay special attention to as ambassadors for their origins. They belong to the 'outside world' (because they are in a certain way in competition with similar products to be found in the market) and therefore have the chance to create a 'wow factor' through that particular monastic something."³

Erdmann also refers to the trust that monastic products enjoy because of their monastic origin: "Because before a product comes into the shop and to the customer, it already has a history,

³ Erdmann (2019), p. 397

so that in the case of the monastery, the customer buys the product with confidence in its integrity. Monastic products make a specific promise and thus meet the current search for quality, sustainability and regional production even where these criteria do not yet play an integrative role.”⁴

"Meaning and Purity" sounds like a claim that is difficult to fulfil, but it is possibly the key to access monastic products. More and more people are refusing to eat meat that is produced using unacceptable methods; buy vegetables and fruit that are harvested as unripe and brought thousands of kilometres to the customer, or use objects that are obviously produced for quick consumption and ultimately for the rubbish dump. Mindfulness towards people and production conditions may best sum up the attractiveness of monastic products.

3.3 Quality standards - defying the fakes

Just how strong this desire for monastic quality criteria is can be seen in the countless European products that are adorned with labels, tags and gracefulness that refer to monasteries. Terms such as "Monastery Cheese" or "Monastery Beer" are not necessarily protected phrases, and so the written or visual connection to a monastery can be as vague as it is unjustified. A recent example is the use of the name of Hildegard von Bingen, a 12th-century Benedictine abbess, poet, composer, and outstanding universal academic. Her name has been used to promote biscuits, teas, herbal mixtures, even esoteric courses, without a single payment going to the monastery connected with her.

Sensibly, the Trappists have protected the monastic beer in their own association, in order to maintain their own quality standards and to be able to give customers a guarantee that their beer really comes from a monastery and is brewed by monks (see the **SKIVRE** Good Practice "[The International Trappist Association – International network to protect brand and values](#)"). The list of "fakes" is long and by no means edifying, and it is important for customers to take a close look not only at the name but also the connection of a product to a monastery for authenticity.

Fortunately, there are also numerous good examples of how new monastic products have been created, which carry in their production the spirit of the monasteries by combining monastic history and regional distinctiveness. Examples of this are the [Kloster-Gin](#) from the

⁴ Erdmann (2019), p. 398

Cistercian monastery Bochum-Stiepel and the [guinice products from the Bronnbach monastery](#) (see below).

3.4 Monastic products as part of the "post-organic era"

But there may be another reason why monastic products are currently attracting a great deal of interest. Do you remember when the first organic products came into the shops and shaped consumer behaviour of an entire generation? For the last 25 years, these products have made it from the backyard of the alternative scene to the big supermarkets – meanwhile no food supplier can afford to neglect organic products in their range. Consumers are no longer able to imagine life without them, and the choice of an organic product is at the same time a choice for sustainable agriculture, responsible animal husbandry and healthy soils.

Now that organic products are available at the supermarket around the corner, the market is looking for a new fashionable product. The post-organic era has dawned and offers monastic products an ideal platform, because they stand for things that are important to more and more people:

- **Authenticity:** monastic products are based on recipes that have been tried and tested over centuries
- **Sustainability,** through the use of high-quality and durable raw materials, and the sale of seasonal products
- **Responsibility:** monastic products are "ambassadors" of a monastic community and its Order
- **Responsibility** for creation by the people involved and for the products
- **Concentration on the essential:** monastic products are the means to an end for monastic life, and are not luxury articles
- **Self-sufficiency:** an aspect where the Coronavirus pandemic has helped to raise awareness
- **Honesty** regarding the composition of ingredients.

Should these result in a requirement profile for a post-organic period, then monastic products are an excellent fit. They are usually based on organic and sustainable products, do not rely on long distances from manufacture to the customer but on regional marketing, and take criteria such as sustainability and resource conservation seriously. So, are monastic products suitable to be classed as "new organic"?

Even if one could draw a conclusion from the growing interest in monastic products, it would be difficult to implement it in practice, because monasteries are not usually interested in big business, but in small quantity and quality production and social entrepreneurship, which also convey Christian values and contribute to the social communities around the monastery. At present, only the large monasteries, such as [Averbode Abbey in Belgium](#) or the [Austrian Klosterneuburg winery](#) have the technical know-how, the long-term strategic orientation and the diversification in the offers to serve a larger market and thus generate income for investment.

But just thinking about how monastic products could play an extraordinary and new role is worth further consideration. What may not be feasible on a large scale can be realized on a smaller scale, especially in rural areas with Orders that have access to extensive agricultural land and with Orders like the Benedictines, where manual work is an integral part of religious life.

4. Characteristics of monastic craft products



Hand-crafted products at the shop of the Schotten monastery in Vienna ©Skivre

4.1 What is a monastic craft product and when is it authentic?

Monastic products started in the past as a means for monastic self-sufficiency, equipment, and often provisions for pilgrims. These products gained income for monastic life and the preservation of it. The production of these goods created employment opportunities for secular workers – not any different from how it happens today.

According to Manufactum, a German retailer of monastic products, a monastic product has to fulfill specific characteristics to be included in the range of products: “A monastic product, no matter where it comes from, must be good, i.e. of high quality and manufactured according to the rules of authentic production. It must be useful and sustainable and not just there to be bought out of compassion or because you want to do a good job. It must function

independently of the monastery and at the same time be an ambassador for monastic culture and the *genius loci*.⁵

Occasionally, brands are developed with specified product characteristics. For example, three product criteria must be fulfilled to use the "Authentic Trappist Product" (ATP) label:



1. All products must be made within the immediate surroundings of the abbey
2. Production must be carried out under the supervision of the monks or nuns
3. Profits are intended for the needs of the monastic community, for purposes of solidarity within the Trappist Order, or their development projects and charitable works.

If we take these three ATP guidelines and bring them together with the definition for monastic products of Manufactum, we can try to make the following classifications of a real monastic product:

Original authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ produced in the monastery or the immediate vicinity ■ the manufacturing must have been done by nuns or monks or at least under their supervision
Purchased original authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the same as original authenticity, but bought in from outside the monastery (this can also be products from other monasteries)
Externally produced for the monastery only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ produced for the monastery (e.g. according to the recipes of the monastery) ■ licensed for production by the monastery ■ the monastery promotes the product with the monastery image. The brand provides information about quality and origin and transfers trust.

⁵ Please see: <https://skivre.eu/a-good-monastic-product-must-be-an-ambassador-of-monastic-culture/>
Retrieved August 21st, 2020

**Souvenirs and
other items**

These products cannot be classified in the three categories. None of these products are real monastic products.

Examples: pens with monastery logos, postcards, and guides to monastic gardens

Figure 1: characterization of monastic products, see **SKIVRE** Module 3 on "[Monastic Products](#)"

The term 'authenticity' is equated with quality, purity, genuineness, honesty, originality and credibility. Monastic products also stand for uniqueness: These products cannot be bought everywhere and have a strong relation to the monastery, locality or the region.

In 2019, a study⁶ (published 2020) focused on the question of whether consumers are actually able to distinguish between authentic and non-authentic products. The study confirmed that they are able to do so. The three most important features are:

- the origin of the product
- their production techniques
- a perceived (high) quality

Above all, origin and production techniques are decisive influencing factors for purchasing decisions. The researchers of the study are particularly positive about the fact that the clear identification of origin, production techniques and materials/ ingredients are perceived as very important by consumers and are, therefore, included in their purchase decisions: this includes high-end products.

4.2 Why buy a monastic product?

The special thing about monasteries as producers is that they possess an invaluable treasure trove: they have recipes, experience, and knowledge that have been tried and tested over centuries, expanded and often renewed. No matter whether it is remedies, plant protection, tools or preparations, monks and nuns have passed on knowledge, observed nature with patience, established business relationships across continents – and were able in the past to

⁶ The study "Economic aspects of geographical indication protection at EU level for non-agricultural products in the EU" was commissioned by the EU Commission (Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs). It is methodologically based on behavioral experiments conducted by the assigned research group.

document this knowledge in writing and store the documents in their libraries. From a sustainability point of view, monastery shops are very important examples of sustainable businesses.

■ **Handiwork, Quality & Sustainability**

Handiwork is still an important feature of monastic products today. Handmade products are an important sales feature in monastic shops, even if it might be difficult to offer them exclusively because the entire product range of a monastery is limited and therefore the offer for interested customers is also limited. But it is precisely these products that bridge the gap from today to the past history of monasteries.

Many customers are looking for something handmade and exclusive. The crucial factor is the 'emotional' access to the products, such as the nun who bakes biscuits in small batches. Purchases in a monastery shop are not religious statements. Most shoppers are not interested in spiritual closeness to the monastery, but rather in what this place, with its consistency in heritage and history, embodies to the outside world. The religious tradition functions as part of this. With the purchase of monastic products, people can bring this feeling to their homes, regardless of their faith.⁷

Customers of monastery shops enter them in the awareness that they will receive special and proven knowledge converted into products. This means that there is a demand for monastic products and their quality, longevity, and sustainability that must be met. All three factors together make a monastic product special and develop its attractiveness through the interplay of craftsmanship and sustainable production. This also includes all those monastic products that differ in quality and originality from comparable products that correspond to the attitude and needs of the customer and are possibly unique.

▪ **Authenticity & Uniqueness**

Monastic products and the monastery shop must have a connection to the monastery and monastic life, because this is the only way to make the monastery shop and its products authentic and sustainable. The products found in the monastery shop are all – without exception – subject to the monastery's own defined rules and quality requirements, which also have to pass inspection by customers. Furthermore the monastic product should stand for uniqueness. This special product cannot be bought everywhere and has a strong relation to

⁷ Klask (2017)

the monastery, locality or the region. The **SKIVRE** training module 4 “[How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically](#)” deals with this in detail.

These attributes of authenticity (origin of the product, production, and quality) are also characteristics for customer loyalty in monastic products. And something else adds to this special relationship of customers to monastic products: they have confidence. It is up to the monastery to redeem this credit of trust, and it can do so in very different ways.

4.3 Quality standards and quality seals

If we summarize the above points and the recurring references to the quality promise of monastic products, the question quickly arises as to how this promise can be fulfilled. This concerns not only the quality side of the products themselves, but also the communication of the quality promise. Some monasteries are already fulfilling this promise, a good example being the [Trappist Association](#).

The French monastic association Monastique has already successfully followed the path of externally visible cooperation: In 1951, the association was set up to protect monastic institutions in France by organizing and assisting them with the production and sale of the products that they manufacture. The organization is the ATC ([Aide au Travail des Cloîtres](#)). The association agreed to:

- develop their product ranges to better respond to the evolution of the market
- provide professional training to monks and nuns in their chosen activities
- help finance production equipment and professional tools

Thanks to the contributions and donations of its members, the ATC is able to carry out its mission of supporting the economic needs of the monasteries. The important outcome of this association is that it has allowed the monks, nuns and especially cloistered sisters to support themselves. The association includes Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations. More than 150 congregations in France make a wide variety of products, from jams cooked in cauldrons to organic wines, from hand-painted earthenware to carved wooden statues, from children's cardigans to Eau de Cologne and beauty creams. Some abbeys offer quality services such as traditional embroidery, bookbinding, carpet repair and the making of wedding gowns and dresses.

The focus is always on craftsmanship, which is the means to an end for the preservation of the monasteries. The logo of the organisation also serves as a seal of quality. The association

itself is an excellent example of the sustainable organization of monastic products as described in **SKIVRE** Module 10 on “[Sustainability Aspects](#)”.

Many monasteries refer to a quality promise in their communications, but they do not publish the corresponding criteria⁸. Others already communicate quality criteria without having protected them as a label or brand⁹. Why should they? The monastery itself stands for the promise, and customers are likely to trust it. However, these days it might be a good idea to think again about this.

SKIVRE’s experiences and our Good Practices show that there are hardly any ambitions for certification or brand protection of quality promises. So does the *genius loci* (the spirit) of monasteries compensate for this? Is the monastery itself automatically the guarantor of quality? Is there a lack of knowledge for implementation? Or perhaps even competition between the Orders and monasteries, as one monk suspected in an exchange with the **SKIVRE** team?

For monastic products, which are distributed solely by the monastery or the Order, seals, labels and brands are not perhaps particularly important. But if monasteries want to address a larger clientele with their products or want to enter the online trade, they will not be able to avoid certifications and quality standards which show the values or quality criteria. Aspects like the following are to be considered in order to come close to the current needs and expectations of customers:

- monastic self-sufficiency
- living and working in communities
- involvement of local suppliers
- idealism
- sustainability
- recyclability
- being essential

⁸ See as example the Cistercian Monastery of Bad Doberan (Germany): <http://www.torhaus-doberan.de/koestlichkeiten-und-kulturgut-der-kloester.html> (in German only).

⁹ Münsterschwarzach Abbey (Germany) dedicates its own internet page to the communication of their quality standards: <https://www.vier-tuerme.de/klosterqualitaet> (in German only)

- connection to the place of origin
- monastic design
- climate-conscious production

SKIVRE training module 8 about "[Creating a Strong Brand](#)" provides information on this.

4.4 Handcrafted as an additional value?

Marketing studies show that customers appreciate the human factor in production processes. They all confirm the important role and potential of handmade products in our contemporary society.

Although machine-made products are often of very good quality, and mostly relatively cheaper than their handmade counterparts, they are missing the key ingredient of "love," according to the study "The Handmade Effect: What's Love Got to Do with It?"¹⁰ According to the findings, handmade products are perceived to contain and to transmit the artisan's "essence" in the form of his or her love for the product in a way that machine-made products cannot.

Participants in the study were instructed to imagine that they wanted to buy a gift for someone special. They were given a list of machine-made items including ceramic mugs, soap, leather goods, and stationery. They were then shown images of the handmade equivalents, some labelled "made with love" or accompanied by heart-shaped graphics and other visual "love" cues. Participants clearly favoured handmade items when they were making a purchase for a loved one, and many were willing to pay up to 17% more for handmade items in general. Consumers seemed to believe that the creator's love for the handmade product had somehow transferred to the product itself, and that the product now "contained love." This was found to be the case even when the customer did not personally know who the creator was.

Emphasizing the handmade aspect of a monastic product can make it significantly more attractive, especially when consumers are buying the item as a gift to convey love to someone¹¹.

¹⁰ Fuchs (2015)

¹¹ A good example for this aspect in marketing terms is presented in the **SKIVRE** blog about the vinery shop at [Klosterneuburg Monastery](#), run by the Augustinian Canon Order in Klosterneuburg / Austria. See <https://skivre.eu/qualified-staff-for-quality-products/> (retrieved September 15th, 2020)

■ **Handmade is thoughtful.**

Each item is a creation of love and skill. The artisans used all their abilities to create a beautiful item that celebrates their craftsmanship. They have imagined each piece, from beginning to end. The thoughtfulness extends to the buyer, who appreciates all the effort and skill.¹²

■ **Handmade is high quality.**

Hand-created products are made to the highest quality because the maker understands the value of each piece. Hand crafted work is built to last. It is not there until the next upgrade or until the guarantee runs out.

■ **Handmade is green.**

The monastery is not a large factory or industry, and its products are generally sold only in the local monastery shop. These products pass through fewer hands than in big companies, creating smaller footprints.

■ **Handmade is sustainable.**

Creators of handmade items care greatly about the quality of the materials they use. They spend time looking for eco-friendly supplies, local production and recyclable packaging.

■ **Handmade is supportive.**

Customers buying a hand crafted item are supporting the local economy and the local community and, in the case of monastery products, the respective monastery directly. They are supporting people, not a huge corporate brand.

■ **Handmade has a story.**

Hand crafted items are created under one roof. By buying in the monastery shop, customers support the creativity and skills of monks and nuns who are the creators of a beautiful piece.

¹² The director of the [monastery shop of the Viennese Schottenstift](https://skivre.eu/in-the-middle-of-urban-life-the-monastery-shop-in-viennas-schottenstift/) reported that the jams he offers under the label of the monastery shop are produced by a farmer's wife in the outskirts of Vienna – hand-cooked and bottled, and delivered personally to the monastery shop. Buyers receive a story with their purchase which is as touching as it is compelling when told by Mr Kleinhappel: <https://skivre.eu/in-the-middle-of-urban-life-the-monastery-shop-in-viennas-schottenstift/> (retrieved September 15th, 2020)

The artisans have spent a long time learning a skill, perfecting a technique and pouring their passion into what they make. The gift has a very special story of a special place woven into it.

■ **Handmade keeps traditional skills and crafts alive.**

When buying a handmade item, support is given to learning, creating and history by allowing craftspeople to practise, showcase and carry on traditions. We are a society that values art and creativity and by buying handmade items, and continuing to do so supports the next generations artists and craftspeople.

■ **Handmade is unique.**

Handmade is not mass-produced. Each item is a unique display of craftsmanship. Each has its own character that is to be admired. Buying handmade products means buying a commitment to authenticity, a guarantee that no other piece will ever be the same.

■ **Handmade is better for one's conscience.**

People buying handmade items are more aware of how their actions influence a potentially bigger picture. They are not supporting mass market products, unethical sourcing or low-cost labour.

The **SKIVRE** training modules 3 on "[Monastic Products](#)" and 4 on the "[Authenticity of Monastic Products](#)" provide additional information on these aspects.

5. Journeys to another world - Europe's monasteries and their unique craftsmanship



Cloister at Basel minster ©Pixabay CC

In the spirit of the **SKIVRE** training modules, specialisations can be identified in the monastic trades that are unique in the marketing sense. In about 10 study visits by **SKIVRE** partners it was repeatedly found that monastery shops are all the more successful when they clearly distinguish themselves. This means that with these specialisations, certain trades naturally come to the fore, namely those where monasteries play to their strengths, some of which have been developed over centuries.

It is always about knowledge that results from (sometimes years or decades of) experience: When can a fruit be harvested? When is the right time for a seed? What degree of moisture must clay have for repairing historical buildings? Many things can be measured, but the ability to judge from experience is something different and more sustainable.

In the German monastery of [Bronnbach](#), the **replanting of a quince garden** is based on historical documents. The aim is to develop independent monastic products from the fruit and thus to help quinces gain new appreciation in the locality and region. In monastery gardens, quince has been cultivated since the 9th century as a food and medicinal product. Seeds and leaves can be processed into tea, the flesh can be prepared as juice, puree or pickled in honey. As a medicinal plant, the quince has astringent, haematopoietic, anti-inflammatory, diuretic, cooling and expectorant properties. It can be used for inflammations of the stomach lining, intestinal diseases, mouth and cold diseases, sore throats, bronchitis, high blood pressure. It is particularly beneficial in the treatment of burns, sunburn, open sores caused by bedsores, bleeding wounds and cracked skin. It was used to ensure food security for the monastery inhabitants in winter and was an integral part of monastic medicine. With the [creation of the quince garden and a quince nature trail](#), the monastery administration consciously drew on the monastery's history and at the same time reacted to a growing public awareness of old fruit varieties and natural remedies. The link with the regional environment is created by the fact that the quinces are given to regional producers for the production of products to be sold in the monastery shop.

Two Greek Orthodox Bulgarian monasteries, the [Kremikovtsi Monastery of St. George](#) and the [Giginski Monastery](#), both near Sofia, are good examples of **consistent product and brand development in agricultural production**. The Kremikovtsi Monastery of Saint George focuses on quality, organic production and employment opportunities for the local population. The Giginski Monastery is a production site for yoghurt, cheese, and various animal products. A unique feature regarding production is their herd of buffalos, a special Bulgarian breed. Both monasteries also have a strong connection to their local and regional environment and are therefore good examples of social entrepreneurship by creating jobs and providing social services such as holiday care for children and young people.

The Belgian [Park Abbey](#) also stands for **social entrepreneurship and local integration**. **Park Abbey** is a Premonstratensian abbey, founded in 1129. It is now part of a huge development project of the Leuven city government which is undertaking the reconstruction of the former Abbey and establishing at the site a multitude of services (agricultural, gastronomic, cultural and as a facility provider for conferences). Restoration work is being carried out, and the various initiatives include an ecological farm, a cow byre, the production of organic milk and cheese, and a microbrewery producing Park Abbey beer. The whole complex has become a hub and meeting place for the citizens of Leuven, with close partnerships with local cooperatives.

The Belgian [Abbey of Averbode](#) was founded in 1134. At that time, their main activity was agriculture, to ensure the abbey's sustainability. Today, the monks at Averbode produce beer, cheese, and bread. They also have a publishing house, where they produce educational books and magazines. They implement an **innovative management model and community engagement** carried out by the Abbey. [Het Moment](#), their own brand, is a perfect example how to develop and market high-class monastic products. The monastery shop is accordingly appealing and professionally designed where, in addition to the monastery's own products, numerous products from local suppliers can be found. So here too, strong networking with the locality and region is evident.

The fact that monastic products from various monasteries can successfully establish themselves in the market together is shown by the monastery shop of [Monastiriakokelari](#) which has existed since 2017 in the centre of Athens in a busy shopping area. The sales area is rented from the University of Athens and is run by six volunteers. The **concept of cooperative marketing** works: the shop attracts around 200 customers a day. The product range includes fresh products such as dairy products, tea blends, beers and wines, jams, soaps as well as monastic medical remedies.

The Austrian [Klosterneuburg Monastery](#), run by the Augustinians, offers a prime example of an attractive monastery store and a no less attractive vinotheque, which is a **role model in branding**. The convent includes a winery and a fruit farm, where its own products are produced and sold in the vinotheque. 98% of the products (wine, sparkling wine, fruit juices) are produced in the monastery itself; the other 2% comes from small regional producers. An assortment of wines, juices, jams, vinegars, oils and chocolates is manufactured or given as basic products to partners, with the Klosterneuburg logo or as the sole products of the partners – sold in the shop locally or online. The philosophy of the monastic products sold in the vinotheque is based on the highest quality, uniqueness, and attractive packaging. This basic line runs through the entire vinotheque: the attractive presentation reflects their chosen approach – uncompromising and authentic, very similar to the [Belgian Abbey Averbode](#). Speciality products are from red St. Laurent grapes. All St. Laurent products are sold under an attractive contemporary design of labels, packaging and information, both in the sales presentation on site and in the online store.

6. Handcrafted monastic products – the main clusters

6.1 Beverages



Champagne produced by Averbode Abbey in Leuven / Belgium ©Kees Grootswagers

If we take a closer look at the product groups that characterise monastic craftsmanship, it is mainly alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages that are produced – beer, wine, liquor, brandy and gin; fruit juices, mineral water, tea blends and lemonades. The cultivation of the basic ingredients (vines, hops, grains, fruits, herbs) has been one of the most enduring achievements of European monasteries, and has left its mark on entire European landscapes.

Cultivation also required agricultural knowledge: production of optimum soil conditions, development of tools and machines, sustainable agriculture, fertilisation and pest management.

Monasteries have played an important role in brewing beer since the Middle Ages: freshly brewed beer was preferred to water as a beverage because water was often contaminated. Because monks and nuns were only allowed to eat a small amount during Lent, monks and nuns satisfied themselves with strong, spicy and calorific beer, as beer was allowed under the rules of fasting. Back then, beer contained even less alcohol than today, which would explain

the large quantities that each monk was entitled to every day: tradition has it that each monk could drink five litres of beer a day. Monastic breweries were often flourishing businesses, even though most of them were closed after secularisation. However, most of the beers that are now called ‘monastic beer’ have nothing to do with monasteries.

Monasteries are just as inseparably linked to the history of wine production. In all European wine regions there are monasteries in which the knowledge of the cultivation of vines and wine production was gathered. Since the Middle Ages, the Church has had a strong influence on viticulture, since wine symbolised the blood of Christ at the Eucharist. Wine was also used as a substitute for possibly contaminated water. Monastery wine was a commodity that was exported far beyond the regional borders and generated income for the monasteries.

In the production of other alcoholic beverages, the monasteries were able to maintain their niche in production, which now makes them special and authentic: liqueurs made from wild cherries, bitters made from herbal mixtures, brandies made from old fruit varieties. In the meantime, monasteries have embraced new, such as gin – a good example of how historical recipes can be developed further.

Non-alcoholic drinks are to be found in the portfolio of the monasteries, especially when they cultivate fruit in their own orchards. Fruit juices are still among the basic products of many monasteries today.

■ Good Practice: Monastic Dry Gin - Made in Silence



Monastic Dry Gin was created in the Cistercian monastery Bochum-Stiepel in 2017, when the monks decided to expand their shop's product range. They felt that it should be something that could be produced in the monastery, or at least with monastic ingredients, and would use the experience and knowledge of the brothers who produced monastic liqueur. The monastery tries to keep the financial commitment as manageable as possible; they rely on a slow growth starting with small batches of 300 litres. Their bottles' classic look and slogans like *Made in Silence* contribute to the brand's appeal. Slogans like "This gin springs from monastic walls, it breathes the power of silence" made the product stronger. The development into a product is described in detail by Justinus Pech

OCist.¹³ Read more: [SKIVRE collection of good practices](https://www.monasticdrygin.de/). (Picture credits: <https://www.monasticdrygin.de/>)

6.2 Food



Pastries from the baking kitchen of the nuns of Monastero Santa Caterina d'Alessandria in Palermo
©Segreti del Chiostro

Monastic Orders have been producing and making delicious food for more than a thousand years. On the one hand, this food supplied the people in monasteries, on the other hand it was also produced for sale, the proceeds of which flowed back to the monasteries.

The Benedictines and Cistercians can be regarded as economic pioneers with considerable influence on the cultural and economic development of the West. Their monasteries were repositories of education, research and science – and the first major commercial enterprises. They pioneered food logistics, salt production, pastoral farming, mining and industry from the

¹³ Pech Ocist, J. (2019), p. 413ff

12th century onwards. In many monasteries, for example, granaries have been preserved; such buildings were part of every large monastery complex.

In monasteries there were water pipes when people still went to the well in front of the gates in the cities. Even in the earliest monasteries of the fourth century, water power was used skilfully to make work easier and thus to increase the contemplative time. The Rule of Benedict demands water mills near to monasteries where possible.

Monasteries were also involved in the trade in salt, the "white gold" of the Middle Ages. Monasteries were inventive and influenced culture in many areas, such as agriculture and plant breeding with improved farming methods such as three-field farming, drainage or fertilisation.

Monastic gardens played an important role both in the supply of food and in the art of healing. Plants cultivated there were used to supply the monastic kitchen, pharmacy, washrooms and church. Everything else was either collected wild or cultivated in the additional orchards and fields of the monastery.



The Borsdorfer Renette was mentioned in the register of the German monastery of Pforta in 1170 (Illustration: ©Lemgo Obstsorrendatenbank): it is still cultivated today. A wall built by Cistercians in the 1330s still surrounds the Clos de Vougeot, one of the most famous vineyards in the world – and the oldest viticultural experimental. Whether in Burgundy, on the Rhine or Danube, in South Tyrol or in the Rheingau, it was often monks who introduced viticulture, first planted slopes and took advantage of the terroir¹⁴. The "Lorscher Bienensegen", an Old High German rhyme from the 9th century, was used to call back a swarm of bees that had flown away – bees were the monks' best friends. Benedict forbade the consumption of four-footed animals and recommended a pound of bread and a pint of beans daily, though lentils, peas and garlic seem to have been a feature of the monastic diet from an

¹⁴ The term covers the soil, the location and slope exposure or orientation, the microclimate and, through cultivation, the influence of man on the landscape.

early stage. Cheese, wine and fish soon followed, the last of these on the grounds that some of Jesus's disciples were fishermen.

Monks were also inventive when it came to easing the hardship of the frequent fasting periods. Meat was traditionally strictly prohibited during Lent. In 590, Pope Gregory I decreed that warm-blooded animals were no longer allowed on the table. Later on, butter, milk, cheese and eggs were added to the list of banned foods.

Monasteries, successful in the production of wool, found loopholes in order to eat the meat of a sheep, which was indisputably a four-footed animal. Benedict forbade the consumption of meat in the refectory but this didn't stop the monks eating meat elsewhere and the rule wasn't always observed by the abbots who had their own table.

The Council of Constance (1414-1418) ruled that everything living in water was counted as fish – and beavers and otters found themselves on the Lenten table, alongside proper fish (leading to their near-extinction). It's even said that pigs were drowned to be counted among aquatic animals.

Even chocolate is allowed by the church! In the past, chocolate was produced exclusively in monasteries. But it was unclear whether the Mexican drink xocoatl, made from the fruit of the Cacahaquahuatl tree, was allowed during Lent. The Council of Trent (1545) reiterated strict fasting rules, but chocolate was not included them. Mexican bishops therefore sent an envoy to Pope Pius V to demand a decision on chocolate. The Pope did not like the taste and decided that "chocolate does not break the fast".

The access to expertise as well as to centuries of experience in their own orders is often a hallmark of monastery and convent production. Monks and nuns, drawn to tradition generally, and particularly drawn to the making of traditional, and preserve old books with recipes of traditional foods and products on which they have relied in their monastic life. Convents and monasteries continue to live an ancient kind of life. Their pride is being able to preserve what's being lost elsewhere.

With small-batch, traditional, handmade products, religious communities fit well into today's food ethos. People are looking for more home-made things, better quality things, and monks or nuns may have an advantage because they produce them the old, traditional way. Nostalgia plays its part, too – people like to buy those foods because they remember how their grandmothers made them, when they lived in villages as children.

■ **Good practice: I segreti del Chiostro - Santa Caterina d'Alessandria Palermo / Italy**



The secrets of the cloister is an initiative which explores the ancient traditions of monastic pastries. It is in the Sicilian city of Palermo at Piazza Bellini that the culinary heritage of the rich cultural melting pot of Greek, Arab and Norman continues today.

Sicily's baking tradition, even though it has its roots in ancient times, was really born in the medieval convent. The Santa Caterina monastery was founded by a local noble family as a Dominican nunnery in 1310. The bakery of Santa Caterina became the source of its biscuits, stuffed buns, cakes, jams and more. The sale of sweets was a source of income for the monastery.

The current initiative is run by manager Maria Carmela Ligotti and a team of bakers and people. They offer sweets from monastic recipes as a treat for visitors to the city and locals alike. In the shop, customers can buy products, linked to 21 monasteries in Palermo. The imaginative names of the delicacies complement the feast for the eyes as well as the delight for the palate: Trionfo di Gola ("Triumph of gluttony"), Sospiri di monaca ("Nun's sighs"), or Minni di virgine ("Small virgins"). The sweets are small works of art as well as testimonies of monastic baking art. Historical stone and metal baking tins as well as wooden models can also be admired.

Read more about this good practice in the [SKIVRE good practice selection about the "Segreti del Chiostro"](#).

(Picture credits: Wolfgang Eisenreich)

6.3 Body care products



Lavender - a typical medicinal plant from the monastic garden ©Pixabay CC

Body care products are as old as monasticism itself. These refer to any sort of product used for both cosmetic and health reasons, including soaps and shampoos, medicinal oils and skin creams. These products come from a variety of sources, but mostly from herbs, for example lavender, which is usually grown in the monastery grounds.

At the monastery of [Santa Maria Novella, Florence](#), aromatic waters were produced to ward off plague. With the outbreak of the Black Death in the 14th century, monasteries increased their production of ointments and medicinal pain relief to help people suffering from the plague. Later, during the Renaissance, these products began to be used for cosmetic purposes such as perfumes or shampoos, becoming valued commodities. Over time, different monasteries began experimenting with different products, depending on the herbs that grew best in their particular region. These different types of body care products created the basis for the large variety of monastic body care products available today.

■ Value of body care products

The production of body care products is of great value to monasteries. Owing to the prevalence of synthetic and artificial products found in shops, many people are in search of products that are more natural, organically grown, and have a proven authentic recipe. These are exactly the traits that are associated with monastic products. Many people want items that are made traditionally and that are not contaminated with potentially harmful chemicals like artificial dyes, fragrances and preservatives, micro-plastics, surfactants, mineral and earth oils, silicones and parabens. They also want products that are produced in a way that reflects their own values, for example, they do not want to buy from a company that tests its formula on animals. Finally, customers want to buy from organisations that do not harm the environment and use natural herbs without any pollutants.

■ Good Practice example: EUCOSMIA e-shop / Greece



[EUCOSMIA](#) is an e-shop related to the Monastery Vatopediou, Mount Athos, Greece. The Monasteries on Mount Athos are self-sufficient; over the centuries, they have amassed extensive experience and expertise

in the manufacturing of products, which is based on traditions and the study of manuscripts from the Byzantine and pre-Christian periods, spanning more than 1000 years. Among the preserved manuscripts, there are some that describe the properties of the various herbs, provide many formulas for remedies, and describe the ways they have been used over the centuries.

Research into these ancient manuscripts has resulted in the development of a variety of natural products such as traditional ointments, moisturising creams, soaps, shampoos, diet supplements, etc., which are now sold on the EUCOSMIA website. Mount Athos is one of the few regions in Greece with virgin, wild vegetation, and a great variety of flora, since it has remained unaffected by the pollutants of heavy industry; thus, the produced goods are natural or organic. This is strongly highlighted in the products' branding.

EUCOSMIA is an example of good practice because it successfully combines different aspects of producing, marketing, selling, and distributing authentic monastic body care products. It has created a brand that is related to a monastery with a tradition of more than 1000 years. It emphasises the fact that it uses and sells pure and organic traditional products. Through

focusing on the organic, traditional, and high-quality aspect of its products, EUCOSMIA has proven successful in its enterprise of monastic body care products.

Read more about this good practice in the [SKIVRE good practice selection about the “EUCOSMIA e-shop”](#).

6.4 Monastery Shops



Monastery shop in Athens ©Kees Grootwagers

Many monasteries have a shop or sales areas where monastic products are sold. The range of possibilities is immense, but can be roughly divided into three types:

1. the monastery shop directly at or in the monastery,
2. the monastery shop with a range of products from several monasteries and
3. the online store.

All types are described in detail in **SKIVRE** training modules 3 on “[The Monastic Product](#)” and 4 on “[How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically](#)”.

■ Monastery shops in direct connection to monasteries

Monastery shops can be wonderful places where monasteries proudly and confidently present their products and offers. In the [SKIVRE Good Practices](#) you will find many of them that document an attention to the needs of customers and show sales skills and unique selling points. The friendly appearance of the shop at [Bronnbach](#) invites you in to browse. At [Königsmünster](#) the focus is on their own monastic products. The Belgian [Abbey of Averbode](#) presents its products with a highly professional approach and includes the bakery and the restaurant in the overall experience.

Many monasteries run a monastery shop, but not all monastery shops deserve to be called a shop, as they are sometimes sales areas with only a few products, arranged in an unattractive way. In some shops the assortment is not primarily determined by monastic products, but rather resembles a general store. Often, they do not respect the dignity of the monastery and there is a danger that they do not appeal to important and different groups of buyers. **SKIVRE** Training [Module 4 on “How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically”](#) goes into this in detail.

■ Monastery shop with a range of products from several monasteries

Monasteries from rural areas often do not see the potential of customers for their monastery because they are far away, or in highly seasonal sales that make regular income and corresponding planning difficult. To solve this problem, for example, several monasteries have joined together to form a sales outlet and locate it in a large city that guarantees sufficient customers. Examples of this can be found in all the major French cities through the [Initiative L'Artisanat Monastique](#), in Ancona in Italy through the [Cooperative Terra in Cielo](#) and in the [Monastiriakokelari](#) monastery shop in Athens (Greece). A similar shop is planned in Sofia (Bulgaria), offering products from several nearby monasteries. The advantages are obvious: sharing costs of rent, staff and access to customer groups.

■ Online shops

The online trade in monastic products is a growing sector, even if this presents monasteries with organisational and financial challenges. More information can be found in [SKIVRE](#)

[module 3 "The Monastic Product"](#) and in the [SKIVRE blog about the Schottenstift's Vienna monastery shop](#). Online shops need technical and logistical know-how as well as storage capacity, and all monasteries also see a problem with high shipping costs, which are not always accepted and understood by customers, especially for smaller orders. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has given a huge boost to online trading, and it is likely to continue to grow and requires consideration.

7. Handcrafted monastic products: business segment with a future



© Pixabay CC

7.1 Social entrepreneurship and monastic craft products

Monasteries have always been the epitome of social entrepreneurship offering a perfect fit with the development and selling of monastic products. Following the definition of the European Commission for social enterprises, it is surprising how well they fit into the definition, although monasteries themselves played no role in formulating the requirements:

“A social enterprise is an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities.”¹⁵

The Commission uses the term 'social enterprise' to cover several types of businesses and two of them clearly overlap with monastic objectives:

- those whose profits are mainly reinvested to achieve this social objective
- those where the method of organisation or the ownership system reflects the enterprise's mission, using democratic or participatory principles or focusing on social justice

There is no single legal form for social enterprises. Many social enterprises operate in the form of social co-operatives; some are registered as private companies limited by guarantee, others are mutual, and a lot of them are non-profit-distributing organisations like provident societies, associations, voluntary organisations, charities or foundations.

Despite their diversity, social enterprises mainly operate in the following four fields which also fit monastic activities:

- **Work integration** – training and integration of people with disabilities and unemployed people
- **Personal social services** – health, well-being and medical care, professional training, education, health services, childcare services, services for elderly people, or aid for disadvantaged people

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy/enterprises_en (retrieved August 21st, 2020)

- **Local development of disadvantaged areas** – social enterprises in remote rural areas, neighbourhood development/rehabilitation schemes in urban areas, development aid and development cooperation with third countries
- **Other** – recycling, environmental protection, sports, arts, culture or historical preservation, science, research and innovation, consumer protection and amateur sports

Social entrepreneurship has become more relevant in recent years, and there are many young entrepreneurs and start-ups who want to achieve social goals through entrepreneurial commitment. Seen in this light, monasteries with their monastic products could be pioneers of an ambitious current trend that is worth communicating much more. Vision, creativity and social thinking also play an important role in the development of monastic products.

7.2 Monasteries as an economic factor for Europe's rural regions

In the **SKIVRE** partnership the partners asked themselves several times whether there are actually data on the economic potential of monasteries, i.e. a database that reflects the economic power of monasteries. Neither the Catholic nor Protestant Churches see themselves in a position to create such a database. Of course, depending on the form of organisation, there are profit and loss accounts or balance sheets of individual monasteries, but obviously there is no collection of data from which conclusions can be drawn regarding the economic relevance of European monasteries. This needs to be looked at.

Historically, many monasteries can be imagined as a kind of enterprise with an abbot at the head. Monasteries were great landowners, on a local and national scales, and their economic power and social and political influence was correspondingly great. Monasteries colonised areas, settling them and developing their economies.¹⁶

There is no question that even today large monasteries are economic factors, even if this is hardly ever recognised officially. Perhaps this is the reason why monasteries often do not play the role in regional development plans that they could, namely as motors of economic and social development. In this respect, this is a plea to support for monasteries, especially in rural

¹⁶ See as an example the Lorsch Monastery in the Hessian Rheingau in Germany: <https://www.kultur-in-hessen.de/geschichten/aufstieg-und-fall-eines-machtzentrums-kloster-lorsch-teil-1> (retrieved September 11th, 2020).

areas, which want to reposition themselves economically and socially. Support is possible in various ways:

- investment aid, grants, loans and guarantees from public authorities (see **SKIVRE** module 9 on “[Financing Strategies](#)”)
- integrated concepts, tailored to the actual needs on site (see **SKIVRE** module 10 on “[Sustainability Aspects](#)”)
- extensive networking (see **SKIVRE** training module 7 on “[Value Adding Through Networks](#)”)
- participation in round tables and decision making bodies (see **SKIVRE** modules 7 on “[Value Adding Through Networks](#)” and 9 “[Financing Strategies](#)”)
- courage and innovation (let things happen!).

7.3 Monasteries and their role in rural development

The **SKIVRE** Good Practices contain many examples of active monastic involvement for maintaining rural areas. This includes, for example, the preservation of cultural landscapes and cultural heritage, social commitment in rural areas and also the preservation of craft skills and equipment.

How can this now be prepared for rural development? Management plans, such as those already mandatory for UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 2014, can be a valuable tool for this. A management plan is an integrated planning and action concept that lays down goals and measures for the protection, conservation, use and development of heritage sites. Management plan focus on legislative, regulatory and contractual measures for protection, boundaries for effective protection, buffer zones, management systems, and sustainable use. Following the structure of UNESCO World Heritage management plans¹⁷, the plan should reflect on the universal value of the monastery and its authenticity and/or integrity, the state of preservation, offers of any kind (including monastic products) potential threats, monitoring, science and research, financial resources, the number of employees and their qualifications,

¹⁷ See as an example Ringbeck (2008). On the UNESCO website there are many managements published, however only a few of them are linked to monasteries: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/>

participating institutions, training offers, awareness raising and promotional efforts, numbers of visitors, visitor guidance, as well as tourism and traffic concepts.

Drawing up such a plan is a major task that can tie up many resources. But it would be a prerequisite for the integration of a monastery into rural development plans and thus again for financial support from the public authorities. It can identify potential and opportunities that are not necessarily visible to decision-makers. Above all, it can show what a great role a monastery can play in regional development.

7.4 Employment perspectives for niche markets

Monastic products cross different economic sectors. In connection with spiritual tourism and cultural tourism, two very important branches of monastic handicraft exist, part of the cultural and creative industries, a branch which has repeatedly – most recently in the 2008 crash – proved to be particularly stable. Art and craft products are creative services. Creative services are what make innovation possible in the first place, and the cultural and creative industries are said to have a particularly high innovative orientation and problem-solving competence, from which the creative companies themselves, and their suppliers, co-operative partners and customers benefit.¹⁸

Monasteries can certainly be classified as creative enterprises in the sense of the definition of the cultural and creative industries, and thus statements of the monitoring report on the cultural and creative industries 2019 of the German Federal Ministry of Economics have a special relevance for monasteries: through cross-innovations, i.e. innovations that are created through co-operation between companies in different sectors and thus have an effect in different economic sectors at the same time, creative enterprises are important innovation drivers for the overall economy. As a result of cross-innovations, spill-over effects occur in which positive effects of value added, knowledge and competences of creative firms spill over into other firms or their branches of industry.¹⁹

If one follows the arguments of the monitoring report, monasteries could take over the function of so-called "experimental spaces" in the regional development of rural areas. The majority of

¹⁸ See the monitoring report on cultural and creative industries of the German Federal Ministry of Economics 2019, p. 53ff: https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Studien/monitoringbericht-kultur-und-kreativwirtschaft-2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4 (retrieved September 11th, 2020)

¹⁹ Monitoringbericht p. 53

European monasteries are located in rural areas which are too often characterised by de-industrialisation, structural change and job losses. They could make a significant contribution to the cultural and economic re-stimulation of areas, since there is a great need in rural regions with shrinking and ageing populations to support demographic and economic stabilisation with the help of creative pioneers.

7.5 The unused potential: monastic products - economic opportunity for rural areas

The potential of rural areas as locations for cultural and creative industries is still neglected in regional development, and it is often unclear as to what extent knowledge gained for urban areas can be transferred to rural regions²⁰. Rarely is the innovative contribution of creative enterprises to the stabilisation of rural areas discussed. So how to achieve this in the case of monasteries?

It is worth trying to bring creative people together with representatives of monasteries and let them develop new products and services together. There are already good practice examples for this, like the German-Polish [monastic network "Klosterland"](#), which in this way developed a successful souvenir product with attractive cards, and then – based on the positive experience gained – developed its own monastic beer. Or the example of the Dutch company [BYBORRE](#), which, together with monks of the Dominican Order, developed the monks' vestments into exclusive designer fashion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjH6C78w66g>

²¹

The key is to be courageous, try things out and be patient. These kinds of developmental concepts can take years before they actually prove successful in cash terms. So why not recruit creative people in a targeted manner, e.g. by offering low rents in vacant monastery premises, of which there are more than enough in all European countries. Experience has shown that monastic spaces have a high atmospheric quality for creative people, which has little to do with the "exoticism of the place" but with architectural conditions that do not exist in this form in urban areas. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to reinforce such a development when it comes to reducing densification in coexistence. The

²⁰ Drda-Kühn; Wiegand (2010)

²¹ SKIVRE partners would like to thank Sander Ummelen from <https://www.waardengedreven.nl/> for the reference.

monitoring report lists the conditions for success in the creation of creative jobs, and the corresponding chapters read like a guide to action for the interaction of monasteries and creative people: "Experimenting with new, hybrid forms of co-operation ..., e.g. in combination with digital and manual work",²² is particularly noteworthy here.

The important role of digitisation cannot be overemphasised, because creative enterprises in rural areas (yes, including monasteries!) do not necessarily have to have their customers in their own location. By working with digital media flexibly and independently of time and space, they can also work intensively with cooperative partners in distant locations and reach many customers. Against the background of the ongoing digitalisation of the economy as a whole, creative product developments remain important because they cannot be taken over by machines so soon and because creative entrepreneurs are pioneers in many areas of digital working.

7.6 Spiritual tourism: an attractive market for monastic products

With people increasingly living in urban areas, many wish now to get out of the city and experience a rural and traditional life. For the last Flash Eurobarometer on "Preferences of Europeans towards tourism" a little over a quarter (26%) of respondents mentioned culture with a clear link to visiting religious sites as a reason for going on holiday²³ Indeed, cultural and spiritual tourism is one of the continuously developing markets, with rising visitor numbers.

Examples of cultural and spiritual tourism include pilgrimages, "holiday in a monastery", religious events, "cemetery tourism", all of which are ways to experience cultural landscapes. The motives for visiting religious sites beyond spiritual reasons are also well identified: "must see" sites, an interest in architecture, art and history or finding places of rest and new strength. Therefore, it is important to understand what people remember most from their visits to religious heritage sites: impressive architecture, candles, and the indoor light (e.g. from coloured glass windows), organ music, smells, bells, and the special atmosphere of religious spaces. Some of the key attractions are exploring amazing architecture, experiencing a

²² Monitoringbericht (2019), p. 58

²³ European Commission (2015)

magical atmosphere, finding a place of meditation, marvelling at places of strangeness (for those not used to religious experiences) and gaining a spiritual benefit during a holiday.²⁴

■ The value of spiritual tourism

This type of tourism has an enormous value for rural communities. Cultural and religious sites have the ability to bring in many tourists each year, allowing the local economy to benefit from it. When visitors come to a cultural site, they expect tour guides, places to eat, places to rest, and transportation to larger urban areas. They also expect souvenirs to take home.

It is important, however, to ensure that the site benefits the local community and vice versa. In the case of monasteries, most of them have traditionally maintained strong ties with the surrounding communities, often hiring them on their premises or collaborating in the exchange of goods and services.

Another aspect to take into account is the social integration of product development and sales; to ensure that the business activity itself is in line with the cultural traditions of the region and the place as described in **SKIVRE** Module 8 "[Creating a Strong Brand](#)". In order to gain community support, a monastery's product development should be recognised as a tool that can help the local community's development. In this regard, the success of product sales and services should not only benefit a handful of stakeholders involved, but also create job opportunities, encourage more people to visit the monastery, and ultimately create a positive economic impact through the integration of cultural and spiritual tourism.

At this point, however, another development should also be pointed out: There are large monasteries which are highly appreciated by pilgrims and visitors interested in cultural and architectural history. Here it can be a great challenge for the monasteries, but also for the surrounding communities, to manage the flow of visitors in terms of infrastructure (mobility facilities, parking spaces, toilet facilities, catering, and accommodation). Comprehensive monitoring is required to avoid overburdening residents and disappointing visitors.

²⁴ Drda-Kühn (2016)

■ Good Practice: Klösterreich



Health from the monastery garden ©Klösterreich at <https://www.kloesterreich.at>

The association [Klösterreich](https://www.kloesterreich.at) is an excellent example of how monasteries can market their status as a place of refuge from the hustle and bustle of city life, attracting visitors to their monasteries and boosting their local economy. Klösterreich was established in Austria and has members in five European countries. Currently it includes altogether 22 monasteries in Austria, one in Germany, one in Switzerland, one in Hungary and two in the Czech Republic.

The convents and monasteries of Klösterreich offer experiences and accommodation for culturally and spiritually motivated visitors. Visiting the monasteries, tourists can experience peace and quiet in a spiritual community for a period of time. Klösterreich provides information in a special online platform for all who want to: actively discover culture and faith, engage in cultural and spiritual encounters, experience the opportunities offered by monasteries and convents. In addition, visitors can participate in the life of the respective community, enlarge their knowledge and education, practice spirituality, strengthen their health or simply relax in peace and quiet. The convents and monasteries of Klösterreich provide a major boost to the local economies of the towns in which they lie. Through capitalising on the local cultural landscape in its branding, the monasteries are not only able to boost the towns' economies, but also to help retain the local values and heritage.

Read more about this good practice in the [SKIVRE good practice selection about Klösterreich](#).

8. Securing a sustainable future - the necessity of training



©Pixabay CC

Monastic heritage represents an important part of European heritage, shared by all EU countries. In the past monasteries served not only the transmission of the Christian faith but were economic ‘hotspots’ for the exchange of goods and services. Today, there are different “operational models” for monasteries: some are still organised and led by their Orders with a focus on ecclesiastical duties. The majority are either secularised or (co)financed by public authorities at regional and national levels. In fact, these monasteries are operated and thereby managed like companies: they employ administrative, technical and managing staff, pay taxes and social costs.

In monasteries still operated by their Orders, monks act as non-salaried employees, but their secular staff are paid. In monasteries operated by public authorities or private operators there is a regular staff for maintaining the buildings, opening them for visitors and making products to sell on the premises. If they are operating apart from their churches, they act as medium-sized enterprises with all responsibilities included. Additionally, the staff at monasteries are

often strengthened by volunteers who act in production, monastery shops and who take on different tasks.

This all links European religious heritage to business and, consequently, link aspects of management to the need for securing a sustainable future; not only from the heritage preservation point of view but also from sustaining organisational, personnel and financial aspects of management. The fabrication of monastic products is an enormous economic chance for many monasteries to gain income for their efforts in preserving their faith and buildings, as well as for creating employment for local people, specifically in rural areas. As already described, monasteries also contribute to the local tourism industry and cultural economy. Monastic products are therefore a means of income and a contribution towards preserving religious heritage. Without these products, the monasteries could not survive. Their knowledge of manufacturing these products is part of the intangible cultural EU heritage and monasteries all over Europe and their stakeholders still have this expertise, keep hold of it and benefit from it.

However, there are peculiarities and challenges monasteries, their stakeholders and their managerial decision makers have to cope with. Generally speaking there are limitations to scaling up their businesses:

- monasteries usually are not interested in “big business”, but in small-scale production and social entrepreneurship, which also convey Christian values and contribute to the social communities around
- those European monasteries active in the field have learned that their products are highly valued by their customers, but that the production and sales processes and the related marketing activities need professional skills, which do not necessarily exist at the same level in monasteries as in professionally operating and privately owned product sales companies

To look at this, the **SKIVRE** team started with a survey to gather, collect and analyse information about the ways in which monasteries organise their production and trading, what capacities and skills they need to be successful in developing of monastery shops or in selling their monastic products further. The following chart illustrates the themes of the analysis:



Figure 2: Main topics for **SKIVRE** analysis on knowledge gaps in product development and product sales knowledge in monasteries

The survey was conducted with 20 participating monasteries from seven different European countries and a diversity of respondents, including monks, employed staff, volunteers in monasteries, managers, and owners of the monasteries:

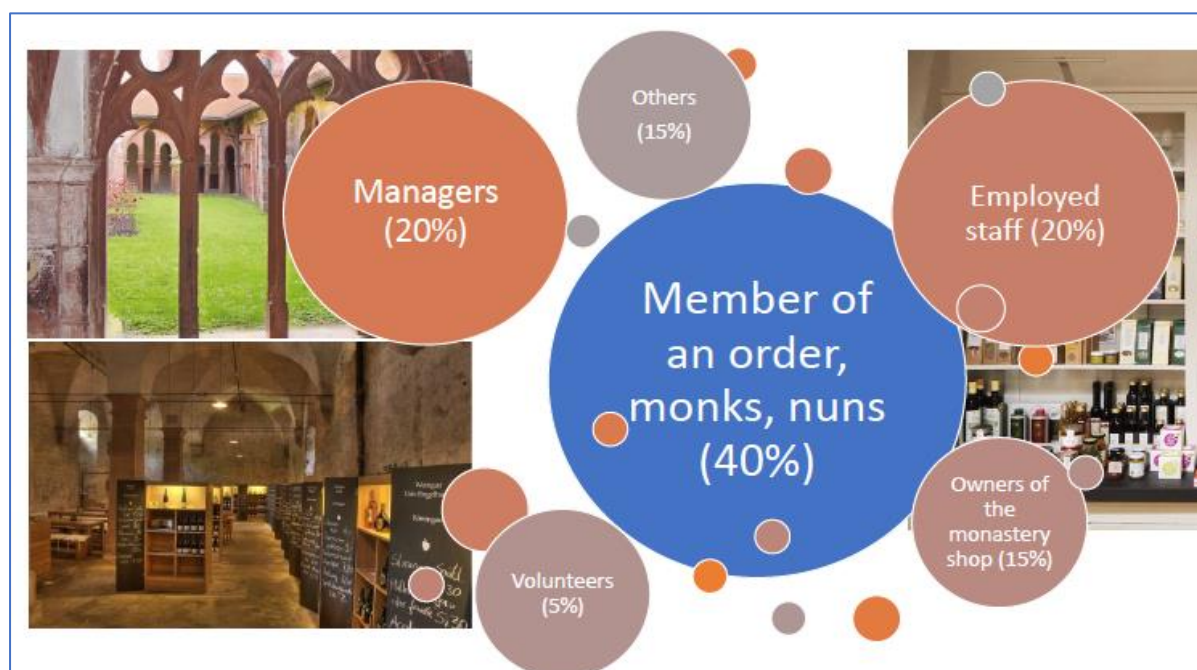


Figure 3: Allocation of survey respondents

The results of the survey can be summarised as follows:

1. monasteries are generally active in product development and sales. They are experiencing growing interests in their products.
2. monasteries define their products as authentic, natural and healthy; made from organic ingredients and with high quality. Their uniqueness makes them special and they cannot necessarily be bought everywhere. Part of the product portfolio has typically a strong relation to the location of the monastery or the locality and region.
3. monasteries typically prefer to collaborate on local and regional levels. Collaboration on transnational levels is limited because of their nature as places of spirituality and religion but also their limited capacity and networking knowledge.

In summary, the analysis confirmed that monasteries target income from product sales to preserve their properties and buildings and to sustain their monastic life. In fact, monasteries have to find the trade-off between aspects of business operations and their monastic life. This confirms their interest in gaining additional knowledge to sustain their production and sales activities, i.e. sell more efficiently through new sales channels like the internet and social media, build their own brands and organise sales through their own shops or distributors and network partners more effectively. [The whole outcome of the survey can be found here.](#)

These are the identified challenges:

- monastic products often lack a professional and contemporary look-and-feel
- an old-fashioned and unprofessional look and the lack of distribution channels hinders their penetration into and acceptance of the markets, despite the high quality of the products
- access to markets is difficult to reach, e.g. that the European market potential cannot be unlocked because of a lack of skills in handling relevant regulations
- product development and product design have to find the trade-off between “Tradition sells” and “Design sells”
- marketing expertise is mostly neither available in the monasteries nor in the parishes or linked communities
- decisions in the distribution schemes have to be stimulated in order to optimise distribution between on-site sales, off- and on-line distribution
- for the last aspect distribution policies and strategies have to be established with positioning the products in international target groups and establishing the distribution channels accordingly.

This is where **SKIVRE** creates benefits: in return for understanding the real knowledge gaps and training needs, the **SKIVRE** team was able to create tailor-made training modules covering exactly expressed needs. This in-depth training for product development and sales as well as for the related topics is needed in order to

- unlock the economic and social potential of monasteries' business operations, and to
- open channels to international markets for monastic products by
- taking a transnational approach.

Orders have always been transnational and international contacts are still existing. The **SKIVRE** training scheme makes use of that e.g. in expanding the sales channels for monastic products. For these purposes the following target groups for the training activities were defined

- employees, nuns, and monks at monasteries active by Orders or operated by third parties like municipalities, country districts, foundations, etc.
- administrative staff, technical staff, producing staff and managing staff
- local actors in close collaboration with monasteries like parish members, non-profit associations
- other relevant stakeholders linked one way or other to monasteries like "Friends of the Monastery"

With the training activities monasteries can improve their knowledge to

- gain income for the preservation of Europe's religious heritage
- offer people income in economically underdeveloped areas
- help them to explore the "entrepreneurial spirit" for gaining standing in a competitive market
- advance the use of digitalisation in rural areas
- strengthen social entrepreneurship in an attractive business field

Knowledge supports the development of new business fields and offers the learners inspiration beyond their working environment. **SKIVRE** training activities are key to successful entrepreneurship and employment opportunities through vocational training, which is offered

1. as a **multilingual training scheme** for increasing professionalism in all related activities of developing a monastic product and its international dissemination. This training scheme is briefly described below and the overview on the training modules can be found under the following link: <https://skivre.eu/training-modules/>

2. this **digital training platform** offers access to training material, Good Practices, training videos, and guidelines for product development
3. the training scheme is accompanied by a **multilingual “SKIVRE Implementation Handbook – a Guide for Marketing Monastic Products”**. This guide is a supplement to the **SKIVRE** training modules. The implementation guide is easy to read to support the developers of monastic products with additional information, checklists and review tools.

■ The multilingual modular training scheme

The **SKIVRE** training scheme focuses on an interactive training approach, no matter if learners use it as a self-learning course or are instructed by a trainer. This modular scheme contains ten learning modules in total, providing – at a glance – the following learning and training content:

SKIVRE Training Scheme
Module 1: Introduction Module
Module 2: Marketing Strategies
Module 3: Monastic Products
Module 4: How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically
Module 5: Distribution Channels
Module 6: Social Media and Communication
Module 7: Value Adding Through Networks
Module 8: Creating a Strong Brand
Module 9: Financing Strategies
Module 10: Aspects of Sustainability

*Figure 4: Overview on the ten developed **SKIVRE** training modules*

All training modules include individualized self-learning – a powerful learning method that enables learners, on the basis of their own experience and knowledge, and on the basis of newly acquired knowledge, to reach development decisions on their own. All modules allow self-assessment: ongoing self-assessment tests or homework that learners send to their trainer prior to the start of each module. Learners might also decide to work in small groups of two or three, if they decide to apply the module's content with colleagues as a self-learning group in their monastery or even supported by an external trainer. In summary, stakeholders gain knowledge individually or in groups.

■ The digital training platform

The online [training platform](#) may be used as a virtual learning environment where the target trainers, learners or learning groups as users can find the training materials, participate in learning activities, use assessment tools and communicate with trainers or other learners depending on the training scenario. Two training scenarios will be supported:

- a) the self-learning scenario, under which users are able to learn without any trainer; and
- b) the 'blended' scenario, under which the trainers may download teaching material (training modules, good practices, exercises, videos, the implementation guide from the online platform to be used in face to face training:

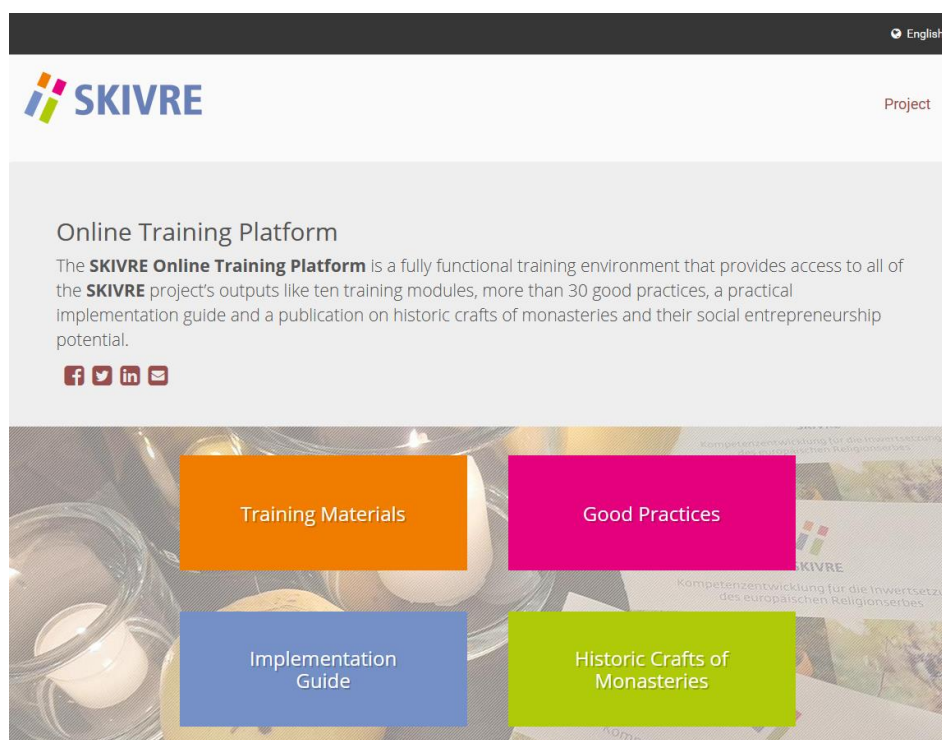


Figure 5: The landing page of the SKIVRE online training platform

The online training platform is organized in four sections:

- Section 1 for the multilingual **SKIVRE** Training Scheme of monastic products and their sales channels Europe-wide associated with good practice examples of them (see below)
- Section 2 for the multilingual **SKIVRE** Good Practices including practice examples of producing and distributing monastic products and eight inspiring videos
- Section 3 for the multilingual **SKIVRE** Implementation Guide for professional production and marketing of monastic products including checklists to assess their progress in learning
- Section 4 for this **SKIVRE** “Publication on Historic Crafts of Monasteries and their Potential for Social Entrepreneurship in the Production of Hand-Crafted Products as a New Business Field”.

All the material is available in four languages: English, German, Bulgarian and Greek. The *Open Educational Resources (OERs)* provide the training content in an online version as well as pdf-downloads. It also offers links to popular social networks.

The platform contains open sections that are publicly accessible, even by visitors without a user account. Furthermore, the online platform offers links to the **SKIVRE** website, which provides all background information relating to the project progress, the project results, the partners and the funding agency.

The online training platform is a new training approach and tool for the target groups of employees and monks and nuns at monasteries as well as local actors in close collaboration with monasteries like parish members or non-profit associations. It was developed in the most user-friendly manner in order to encourage its easy usage under a Creative Commons licence, which means that it is open to everyone interested in scaling up existing skills and experiences.

■ Online examples of Good Practices

The **SKIVRE** online training platform provides a digital library with more than 30 Good Practice examples that present selections, from over 25 different monasteries, aimed at transferring practical knowledge regarding the production, marketing, and distribution of monastic products. The goal of these examples is to inspire the monastic communities who are interested in starting or extending their production of monastic goods. The digital library is available under the link: <https://training.skivre.eu/main/toolbox.php?department=good-practices> .

The users may search the Good Practices based on different search criteria, such as, the country of origin of the monasteries, the topic, the language and the type of the content (text or video).

■ The multilingual Implementation Handbook

The “Implementation Handbook – a Guide for Marketing Monastic Products”, available under the link <https://training.skivre.eu/>, gives advice for representatives of monasteries and their stakeholders on local/regional level how to create a marketable product out of existing products or new ones. The handbook also refers to sales channels, value chains, professional online and offline advertising. It offers easy-to-use material for the implementation of full **SKIVRE** training. The guide is meant for representatives of European monasteries, which already have monastic products in the market or would like to develop products, monastery shops, interested parties in producing and selling monastic products (monasteries, retailers); local actors in close collaboration with monasteries like parishes, non-profit associations like “Friends of the Monastery.”

While the intended audience is representatives of monasteries, the information may be used by anyone interested in marketing a monastic product. The information is also meant for monasteries at any stage of marketing monastic projects from those that simply have an idea to those who already have shops or monastic production in place.

Considering the training and learning elements briefly described above it can be stated that the modular training system strengthens key competences in continuing vocational education and training, e.g. business skills, numeracy and digital skills. It enhances access to training and qualifications in rural areas and for the low-skilled workforce at monasteries. It respects elements of non-formal and informal learning of persons voluntarily active in monasteries, and it supports permeable learning pathways to jobs in religious heritage preservation.

9. SKIVRE - joint efforts for the preservation of European monastic history



The SKIVRE team 2019 at Park Abbey in Leuven / Belgium ©Skivre

The Erasmus+ **SKIVRE** project aimed at empowering management, staff, monks, and nuns at monasteries with a most interactive training approach in gaining relevant skills for raising revenues for the preservation of religious heritage sites:

The [SKIVRE homepage](#) includes links to the e-training platform and many social media tools and provides access to an inspiring multi-lingual blog on monastic products, data and analyses, training material and training events in seven European countries.

SKIVRE is an Erasmus+ project aimed at empowering management, staff, monks, and nuns at monasteries with a most interactive training approach in gaining relevant skills for raising revenues for the preservation of religious heritage sites:

The **SKIVRE** homepage (including access to many social media tools) provides everyone interested in monastic heritage with an inspiring multi-lingual blog on monastic products, data and analyses, training material and training events in seven European countries.

The partnership comprises a multidisciplinary European team, which represents the target groups and expertise needed for training development:

media k GmbH | GERMANY
(coordinator)

media k GmbH offers long-year expertise in religious heritage preservation and in the management of heritage preservation projects.

www.media-k.eu

Future for Religious Heritage
| BELGIUM

Future for Religious Heritage is a non-faith organisation open to all. It brings together those working to protect religious heritage all over Europe.

www.frh-europe.org

GUNET | GREECE

GUNET is a Greek specialist in creating online learning platforms, which offer different kind of learning experiences adapted to different topics.

www.gunet.gr

INI-Novation Bulgaria OOD | BULGARIA

INI-Novation is an education provider specialised in generating economic effects from cultural heritage.

www.ini-novation.com

Bronnbach Monastery | GERMANY

Bronnbach monastery is a former Cistercian monastery now operated by a public authority in the German Tauber valley. The monastery started to develop monastic products based on the history of the site.

www.kloster-bronnbach.de

Wissenschaftsinitiative
Niederösterreich | AUSTRIA

Wissenschaftsinititative is an education provider with longstanding experiences in developing learning platforms and learning material for heritage preservation.

www.wissenschaftsinitiative.at

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