

# "THE LIVING TEXTILE HERITAGE OF THE ALPS"

## HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

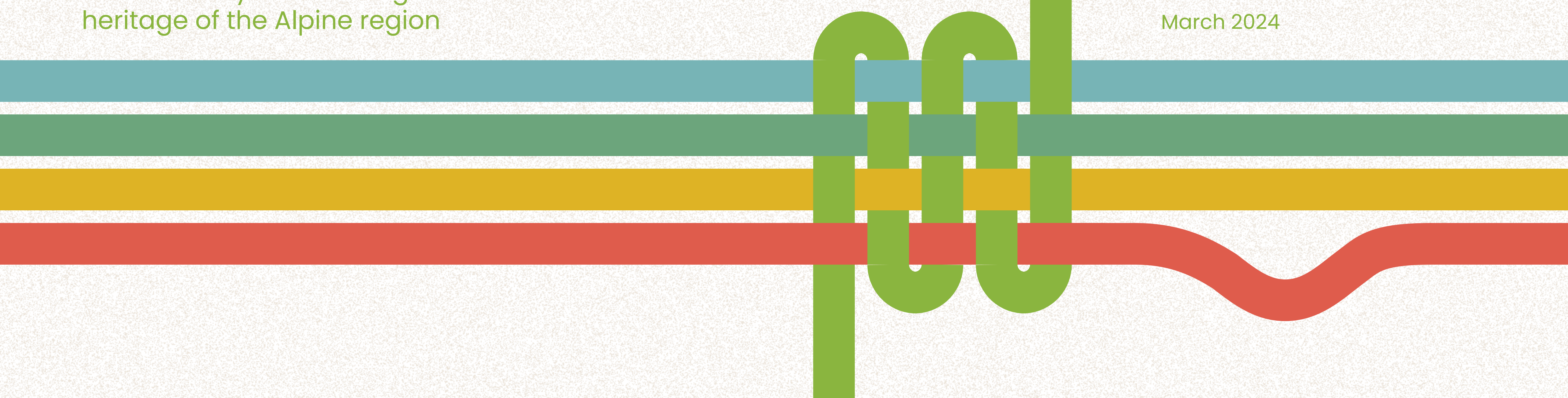
Takeaways from a multi-layered  
research day on the living textile  
heritage of the Alpine region

Interreg  Co-funded by  
the European Union

Alpine Space

AlpTextyles

March 2024







# INTRODUCTION





## A RICH TAPESTRY OF TRADITIONS, BEST PRACTICES, AND INNOVATIVE SPARK AT THE HEART OF A SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TEXTILE VALUE CHAINS IN THE ALPINE REGION

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Heritage and circularity are not terms we often hear together. With “**The Living Textile Heritage of the Alps**” **Research Day**, we aimed to change that by highlighting how **heritage matters for the ecological transition** of textile supply chains in the Alpine region. The Alps boast a rich textile heritage, teaming with artisanal and industrial traditions that continue to thrive despite globalization and the impact of synthetic fibers.

This heritage offers invaluable lessons for today’s world: local resources were cherished, by-products were repurposed creatively, and fabrics were crafted to last — not disposed of after few uses like the products of global fast fashion. However, to fully appreciate and utilize local fibers such as wool and flax, it’s essential to **rebuild supply chains** that have been fragmented by globalization.

Local or even national efforts alone are often insufficient. Cross-border collaborations within geographically limited scales can harness the benefits of **regional specialization**, cutting costs and enhancing product quality.

Both consumers and policymakers have pivotal roles to play in this transition. Consumers, despite their guilt over unsustainable choices, cannot shoulder the burden of this economic shift alone. Businesses must step up, and policies must ensure fair competition by regulating imports that do not meet our stringent European standards and by promoting the use of local resources like wool, which is often misclassified as waste rather than a valuable resource.

“The Living Textile Heritage of The Alps” event underscored the necessity of creating platforms for dialogue on these issues, **bridging gaps between culture, agriculture, craftsmanship, industry, marketing experts, and policymakers**. Such interactions among stakeholders who rarely communicate can lead to innovative solutions derived from shared experiences. Circularity extends beyond resource management — it’s also about fostering ongoing dialogue!











## KEYNOTE 1

# Mapping the living textile heritage of the Alps: Wool, Linen, Silk & other fibers

Dr. Katarina Šrampf Vendramin





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## THE ALPINE REGION: BIRTHPLACE OF CENTRAL EUROPE'S TEXTILE INDUSTRY

The Alpine region boasts a rich textile heritage shaped by natural resources and unique geography, which led to the development of specialized textile crafts and industries. Key production centers such as Lyon, Biella, and Como were well-connected to distant markets and coexisted with local textile cultures. These regional industries emerged to meet the self-sufficiency needs of rural populations, utilizing wool, hemp, flax, and other local resources to fulfill diverse needs.

2

## INDUSTRIALIZATION, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE DE-TERRITORIALIZATION OF TEXTILE VALUE CHAINS IN THE ALPINE REGION

Starting in the 19th century, the introduction of mechanical aids spurred profound innovation, causing the decline of some textile centers and the thriving of others. Globalization, competition with imported natural fibers, the rise of synthetic fibers, and offshoring production have led to a loss of textile expertise and capacity. Additionally, urbanization and changes in rural life have threatened the survival of many traditional textile arts and crafts.

3

## SAFEGUARDING TEXTILE HERITAGE FOR A SUSTAINABLE, CIRCULAR FUTURE IN THE ALPINE REGION

Textile production and consumption in rural and pre-industrial centers were inherently circular, using local resources, creatively repurposing waste, and producing durable products. Today, traditional practices across the Alps are being revitalized and adapted to meet modern needs: communities are repurposing wool that would otherwise go to waste, cultivating flax and hemp again, and reviving old knowledge and practices, tailoring them to contemporary lifestyles. The living heritage of the Alps, a rich tapestry of vibrant cultures, inspires a sustainable future for the textile industry.







**KEYNOTE 2**

# The routes of fabrics

*(Les routes de étoffes)*

**Aziza Gril-Mariotte**





## 1

### DISTANCE AND VALUE: A REVERSED RELATIONSHIP

In the past, luxury textiles were rare, costly, and imported from afar, while local textiles were common and affordable. Today, the value perception has reversed: imported textiles are now cheap and widely available, whereas locally produced textiles are rare and expensive.

## 2

### THE DARK SIDE OF TEXTILE TRADE, PAST AND PRESENT

When following trade routes, we often focus on their commercial aspects related to the exchange of raw materials and finished products. However, there are also significant flows of people and knowledge, mostly linked to geographical discoveries, colonization, and geopolitical shifts. For example, the fall of Constantinople led to silk weavers fleeing to Italy, bringing their expertise with them. Similarly, the triangular trade, which involved transporting enslaved people from Western Africa to New World plantations, highlighted how the cotton trade was intertwined with human trafficking. This historical context reveals that textiles are more than luxury and aesthetic objects – they also reflect the troubling aspects of societal history, echoing modern issues like child and slave labor in Asian textile-clothing factories.







### KEYNOTE 3

# Developing outdoor activewear in Arles merino wool

*(Développement de vêtements d'activités de pleine nature en laine mérinos d'Arles)*

**Patrick Fabre**





## 1

### PROMOTING AUTOCHTHONOUS WOOLS REQUIRES A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

Valorizing indigenous wools requires the concerted efforts of many stakeholders over time. The Maison de la Transhumance, a small organization in Southern France dedicated to safeguarding and promoting the living heritage of transhumance, has played a prime role in this endeavor. Arles Merino wool, known for its high quality, has faced multiple challenges, with breeders struggling to cover even the cost of shearing. Although the idea of using this wool for outdoor wear—similar to what foreign brands were doing—had long been discussed, it only became a reality with public funding, local collaboration, international expertise, and the formation of a breeders’ collective. This effort led to the launch of a new brand, La Routo, involving working textile producers to develop prototypes, coordinate production, and define a market positioning linked to the

## 2

### CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION DRIVES SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

The wool for La Routo products begins its journey in Valensole, Alpes de Haute-Provence. Post-shearing, the greasy wool is transported to Biella, Italy, where it undergoes washing, combing, carding, and spinning. Finished products are then crafted in Biella (sweaters and jackets), Troyes, France (socks), and Baden-Württemberg, Germany (t-shirts). For first-layer products that touch the skin, Arles Merino wool is blended with finer Merino wool from the Falkland Islands for optimal comfort. Aside from this exception, the entire production process occurs within a 600 km radius, reducing the environmental footprint and ensuring top-quality production. This approach, while not entirely “Made in France,” achieves a quality and sustainability level that would be unattainable within a strictly French value chain. Despite involving multiple countries, this value chain remains small-scale compared to the global operations of most sports and fashion brands.







## KEYNOTE 4

# AlpTextyles: Beauty Unveiled

**Davide Alesina Maietti**





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## ECHOES OF AUTHENTICITY AND NATURE

What contemporary creativity sees in the Alps is an opportunity for reconciliation through textures, colors, and materials inspired by their landscape. Today, people's need to interconnect with nature points to a transformative path toward sustainability, resilience, and mutual well-being.

2

## AN AESTHETIC SOURCE

The Alps are considered a precious aesthetic source of inspiration for many sectors of contemporary creativity: lifestyle, product and interior design, art, architecture, and fashion are looking at mountains, nature, flora, fauna, folklore, traditional costumes, crafts, physical activity and sports, as an ideal beauty characterized by a more authentic and deep contact with nature and life.







## KEYNOTE 5

# Europeana Fashion: Europe's Fashion Heritage online

Marco Rendina





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## THE PARADOX OF OPENNESS

While carrying many benefits in terms of accessibility to knowledge and dissemination of traditions, open licensing has also become less effective and more ideological, leading to the so-called *paradox of openness*, where open access works as a drive for both challenging and supporting power concentrations/ imbalances.

2

## BALANCING OPEN ACCESS AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Genuine openness involves more than just the mere release of resources online. It's about managing these resources thoughtfully and maximizing the benefits of making them available to the public, striking a careful balance between the openness of resources and the protection of cultural rights.







## KEYNOTE 6

# WIPO's Activities on Indigenous Peoples and Fashion

Daphné Zografos Johnsson





# 1

## A NORMATIVE GAP

Traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, legally laying in the public domain, are at risk of misappropriation. This can be the case with traditional textile arts when employed as inspiration or appropriated by the fashion industry. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is working to define a new category of intellectual property to fill this normative gap, providing practical legal instruments to indigenous people and local communities.

# 2

## GUIDELINES FOR RESPECTFUL COLLABORATION

Companies misappropriating traditional cultural elements often do so for lack of knowledge. WIPO is fostering dialogue to build understanding and trust between companies and local communities/indigenous people. This practical approach features guidelines for the fashion industry to promote a new framework based on research, respect, communication, and fair collaboration.







## KEYNOTE 7

# Mapping the wool sector from an economic perspective

Dr. Tobias Chilla  
Markus Lambracht





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## VALUE CHAINS

The Alpine wool sector consists of two distinct value chains differing in scale and product segments: the global part is characterized by highly standardized fibers (i.e., Merino wool), while the regional part emphasizes local embeddedness and the revaluation of wool for local production.

2

## INSTITUTIONS & CERTIFICATIONS

There is an evident gap between Alpine textile institutions and Alpine certifications and labels linked to the specifics of each Alpine country's legal system and approaches.

3

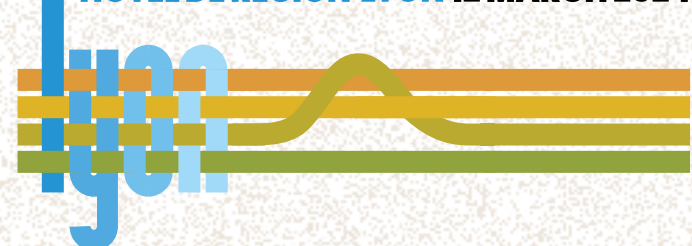
## LOCAL SHEEP

Local sheep breeds yield small quantities of raw wool with specific fiber characteristics. This is decisive for hampered market access to the global level and favors the regional development of specialized applications, such as fertilizer and insulation.









**KEYNOTE 8** | **ROUNDTABLE**

# Wool and other fibers “Made in the Alps”: Toward a sustainable and circular future

**Dalena White, Pascal Gautrand,  
Patrizia Maggia, Lucija White**





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## A POSITIVE EXAMPLE FOR A STRUGGLING MARKET

Wool production is declining worldwide mainly due to geopolitics and the climate crises, with the fall of sheep farmers' income making the profession unappealing to new generations. Multidisciplinary, collaborative projects like AlpTextyles can set the standard for good practices to be replicated. Local communities everywhere share a common goal: preserve their textile cultural heritage, leverage it as a marketing tool, and help farmers bring their crafts to the international market.

2

## GREAT DIVERSITY, GREAT CHALLENGES

Supporting the wool industry involves different actors and requires multi-sectoral knowledge, having a significant impact on biodiversity and shaping the landscape. As the Alps feature small herds and a great diversity of breeds, producing homogeneous material proves problematic. However, biological and cultural diversity is a wealth to be protected. Only a collective endeavor can stand up to this challenge.

3

## TRANSCENDING FASHION TOWARDS VALUES

While fashion is connected to ephemerality and consumerism, getting dressed is an *agricultural act* – with a distinct environmental impact and a moral weight. Clothes must become bearers of value, expressing one's identity and conscious choices, like using natural fibers that are products of a good work ethic. Many projects all over Italy have proven that total wool traceability and a circular economy with a sustainable approach are, indeed, feasible.

4

## SAVING WOOL AND ITS HERITAGE

An increasing number of European countries with a rich heritage connected to shepherding and sheep breeding face a common challenge: the wool sector is weakening, and traditional know-how is disappearing. Due to a broken value chain, over 90% of local wool is discarded and wasted. Consumers can and must be educated on the qualities and usefulness of the fiber: the natural and cultural landscapes are at stake.







## KEYNOTE 9

# Alpine symbolism in brand communication

Alessandro Bevilacqua  
Giancarlo Traina





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## SYMBOLISM-DRIVEN MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

The Alps are so iconic that they are now synonymous with mountaineering. They evoke sensations that are appealing and useful to strengthen brand marketing and messaging: nature and freshness, adventure and exploration, technical performance, heritage and tradition, luxury and exclusivity. As the image and perception of the alpine space are widely positive, brands often associate themselves with the Alps regardless of their authentic connection with the region. In doing so, they utilize different approaches to leverage alpine cultural meanings related to the cited sensations.

2

## COMMUNICATION MODELS: THE ALPS AS A PLACE OF PRODUCTION OR CONSUMPTION?

Associating themselves with the Alps in their marketing communications, brands strategically utilize geographic locations to imbue their products with symbolic meanings based on the rich repertoire of sensations they evoke. While some brands highlight the Alps as a place of production, others depict Alpine landscapes as a site of consumption. With regards to the latter, depending on their history and the current location of their supply chains, brands adopt an approach based on one of three models: “Made In,” i.e., brands that produce their goods in the Alps; “Fiber Origin,” i.e., brands that use fibers from the Alps; or “Brand Origin,” i.e., brands founded in the Alps.

3

## AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING, NOT “ALPWASHING”

Brands without productive connections to the Alps can still capitalize on the region’s image by portraying consumption against the backdrop of the Alps’ stunning landscapes. This does not constitute “AlpWashing,” as these brands do not claim their products are made in the Alps. However, brands with stronger Alpine roots might emphasize their deeper connections to the region in their communications to distinguish themselves from those leveraging the Alpine image through consumer associations only.







## KEYNOTE 10

A map of textile origin and quality labels

Markus Lambracht





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## A HOSTILE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Alpine wool is negatively impacted by EU regulations. Being classified as an agricultural by-product (that is, a waste product), it is denied crucial funds and support. Environmental certifications favor non-animal fibers, and quality standards and certifications do not specifically feature alpine wool.

2

## PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY

For demand to increase, it's pivotal to associate the European Alps with high-quality wool through transparency and effective marketing. Successful networking and technical innovation in terms of product development and sustainable production are also important for a sector that, despite the difficulties, has great economic potential.







## KEYNOTE 11

# Consumer perceptions of local and sustainable textile value chains

Marta Pizzetti, PhD  
Verena Gruber, PhD





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## ALIGNING ALPINE PRODUCTS WITH CONSUMER VALUES

Awareness is growing, with consumers associating Alpine products with sustainability and having a positive view of products made from upcycled or recycled wool. By aligning with consumer values and prioritizing sustainability, SMEs can meet the growing demand and contribute positively to the environment and their communities.

2

## EMPOWERING CONSUMERS WITH TRANSPARENCY IN SUSTAINABLE TEXTILES

While consumers are urged to make sustainable choices, they feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the textile industry with its offers and promotions. This, along with AlpWashing and cultural appropriation, makes it hard for companies offering sustainable alternatives to be heard. By focusing on transparency and engaging in authentic storytelling, SMEs can effectively communicate their commitment, making it easier for consumers to choose their products.







## KEYNOTE 12

# Consumers won't save the world: Towards a sustainable transformation of textile ecosystems

*(Les consommateurs ne sauveront pas le monde : Vers une transformation durable des écosystèmes textiles)*

**Maud Herbert**





# 1

## BETTER NUMBERS ARE NEEDED TO TRANSFORM THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Traditional accounting, which focuses solely on economic values, must be complemented by measures that address socio-environmental impacts and the climate emergency. These measures include product life cycle analyses and corporate-level environmental performance evaluations. CARE (Comprehensive Accounting in Respect of Ecology) is a promising new approach in this direction. Additionally, environmental labeling should be used to communicate this information to consumers.

# 2

## HEALTHY TEXTILE ECOSYSTEMS EMBRACE ULTRALOCAL AND SMALL INITIATIVES

Sustainable textile ecosystems are fragile. It is crucial for larger entrepreneurial projects to coexist with local and ultralocal initiatives that adopt a “sobriety” business model, which rejects growth at all costs or even resists the idea of growth as inherently desirable. A healthy textile ecosystem allows each actor to find its niche, with small players engaging in “co-opetition” – a blend of competition and cooperation, such as sharing resources. This balance ensures resilience and sustainability within the industry.

# 3

## CONSUMERS WILL NOT SAVE THE WORLD

According to the GreenFlex social barometer, which has been tracking attitudes in France for 20 years, 70 to 90% of people express concern for sustainable development, yet only 10 to 17% take sustainable actions. These figures have remained consistent over the years – indicating that consumers alone cannot drive the necessary changes. Expecting them to do so can be counterproductive, as it diverts attention from the crucial need for a profound transformation of textile value chains towards greater circularity.







**KEYNOTE 13** | **ROUNDTABLE**

# Policies toward circular textile value chains

Mikael Garellick, Majda Potokar,  
Michael Jung, Ekaterina Stoyanova







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## CIRCULAR TEXTILE AS THE EUROPEAN FUTURE

In Europe, the textile industry is the fourth sector with the heaviest environmental impact, and 99% of its waste is discarded. To move away from fast fashion and greenwashing, the EU works towards a future where clothes will all be durable, repairable, and recyclable. The strategy to reach these goals features eco-design requirements and certifications, more transparent information and labels, and new, more stringent laws to guide producers away from waste – toward a circularity that should be the norm.

2

## CIRCULAR TEXTILE AS THE EUROPEAN FUTURE

Other than being “naturally” circular in itself, the textile value chain could provide cross-sectoral contributions for a wider circular economy. Food and housing are the two sectors with the biggest environmental impact in the EU. Textile waste could be employed in construction works and as fertilizer, in two positive examples of industrial symbiosis and sustainable use of resources.

3

## NEXT GENERATION COMMUNICATION

The circular economy has ancient roots in the Alpine textile value chain, yet it feels like a novelty to consumers who don't hear about this conversation enough. In this sense, communicating to stakeholders is crucial. The power of AlpTextyles lays in capitalizing on the model, local ecosystems to foster the production of heritage- and resource-sensitive products that fit the market while promoting a renewed dialogue between past, present, and future, blending tradition and innovation.

4

## A MASSIVE TRANSITION

Sixteen legislative proposals by the EU are changing the face and inner workings of the textile industry. Circular economy drives new business models and reshapes the value chain: companies will have to adapt, balancing sustainability and competitiveness. They will need support through market surveillance, financial help, knowledge, and examples. Projects such as AlpTextyles can provide precious guidance, accelerating this green transition.



# ALPTEXTYLES

INTERTWINING CULTURES

AlpTextyles is an Interreg Alpine Space project that gathers the heritage of Alpine textile ecosystems to develop collaborative business and cultural solutions toward a circular and sustainable textile industry.

**SUPPORTED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION THROUGH THE INTERREG ALPINE SPACE PROGRAMME**

[www.alpine-space.eu/project/alptextyles](http://www.alpine-space.eu/project/alptextyles)

