

An aerial photograph of Sheki City, Armenia, showing a dense cluster of buildings with red-tiled roofs nestled in a valley. The city is surrounded by lush green hills and forests. In the foreground, a large, long, light-colored stone building with a dark roof is visible. The background shows a steep, forested hillside.

EU4Culture

Cultural Development Strategy for Sheki City

2022-2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is a Cultural Development Strategy (CDS) for Sheki city developed within participation in the EU4Culture project funded by the EU. The EU4Culture project aims to foster culture and creativity as an engine for growth and social development in Eastern Partnership countries. Sheki city alongside the other two Azerbaijani towns participates in this project and aims to join EU4Culture's mission to help enhance the role of the cultural sector as a driver of economic development, and also promote intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange across the EaP partner countries.

The CDS for Sheki has been developed by the main applicant of the project, The Reserves Management Center under the State Tourism Agency in close collaboration with the co-applicant, the "Yukhari Bash" historical-architectural reserve in Sheki. The CDS for Sheki introduces various components necessary for the development process, in particular, the followings.

CDS starts with a detailed description of the general, geographical and historical background of the city and presents information about its universal values that distinguished the city as a World Heritage Site.

The cultural mapping of Sheki is a significant and important part of CDS. It presents a detailed description of the tangible heritage of the city as well as intangible elements that build up the core of the development strategy. The intangible heritage of Sheki reflects its rich history, cultural traditions, and creativity. There are many types of craftsmanship that still survive despite the challenges of modern and global tendencies in production. Silk production, shebeke, embroidery, pottery, wood and metalworking, and other traditional craftsmanship activities are one of the main income generation tools for the local community. The cultural mapping part of the CDS covers information about the museums of Sheki, their current status and development areas.

Sheki has quite extensive international recognition and it implies additional requirements on the city's management in terms of protecting city's heritage according to international standards. So, there is information about the additional managerial and conservational standards applied for Sheki's heritage management.

The cultural mapping also provides information about the cultural life, projects, and events happening in Sheki on a regular basis.

The list of stakeholders involved in CDS planning and implementation is quite extensive and includes both government institutions and representatives of civil society and other cultural sector actors. The stakeholder mapping part of the CDS provides detailed information about the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder and their expected involvement in CDS implementation.

Further on, the document explains the CDS preparation methodology and presents information about how the CDS was prepared, its organizational and coordination issues, the research part, and the stakeholders involved in the preparation process and the timeframe of the CDS preparation activities. It explains how the prepared document is aligned with other national and international standards and documents.

Key issues, challenges and existing opportunities were researched and analyzed during the CDS preparation period, and based on the results of this work, a SWOT analysis has been formed and presented in CDS.

In the following chapters, the document puts forward the Vision and Mission of the city's cultural and creative industry.

VISION

- ✓ Culture and creativity drive the economic growth of the city and enhance the life of the residents of Sheki
- ✓ The creative industry is thriving and reaching new audiences, empowering current and next generation of artisans and creative industry managers
- ✓ Local and foreign tourists visit Sheki for unique cultural experiences
- ✓ Craftsmanship traditions enjoy great visibility and attention, nurturing pride and perpetuating the heritage
- ✓ The city is recognizable internationally with its unique traditions and creativity

MISSION

- ✓ Increase the engagement of residents and visitors of Sheki with arts and culture
- ✓ Develop unique cultural experiences and tourism products
- ✓ Create opportunities for artisans to introduce their work in a new light while looking for talents on a constant basis
- ✓ Offer targeted professional training for the creative industry participants
- ✓ Drive economic growth, job creation, talent retention, and perpetuation of craftsmanship traditions through sustainable development of the industry

Based on the Vision and the Mission, the CDS has established 5 important areas as the focus areas for development.

AREA 1. Cultural Governance, Policymaking, and Participation

AREA 2. CCI Platforms and Participatory Approach

AREA 3. Capacity Building and Learning

AREA 4. CCI and Tourism

AREA 5. Internationalization and Cooperation

Strategic goals were identified for each focus area and operative goals and actions were developed accordingly for each strategic goal.

Strategic goal 1. Effective governance in CCI is achieved through coordination, a participatory approach, and raised awareness.

Strategic goal 2. A culture of active engagement and participation is established by creating necessary platforms.

Strategic goal 3: A self-sufficient, dynamic, sustainable, competitive, and innovative cultural environment is built by investing in the capacity and professional development of the youth and CCI actors.

Strategic goal 4. The culture and creativity of Sheki are utilized for the region's sustainable development and social well-being through integration into the tourism development policies.

Strategic goal 5: Sheki city is recognized by and engaged in the international arena through active promotion, participation, and networking activities led by its CCI sector actors.

The CDS also contains a detailed description of the Implementation process including monitoring and evaluation activities. To ensure a smooth start to the implementation of the project, it is important to sort out several key aspects. Project team formation and the development of the work plan are considered a good start for the implementation of the project. Monitoring of the project implementation is done by the project team based on the logical framework prepared for CDS. Monitoring will include supervision missions, as well as technical reporting covering the delivery of results and impacts. Monitoring activities such as surveys, and assessments are important monitoring activities that will be implemented. Updating the action plan based on the results of monitoring and other management decision-making is another stage of the monitoring process of this CDS.

Finally, CDS describes how it covers and includes all cross-cutting principles engraved in a 5-pillar strategy: content, network, capacity-building, policy, and communication.

CHAPTER 1. Introduction: Sheki and its Cultural Mapping

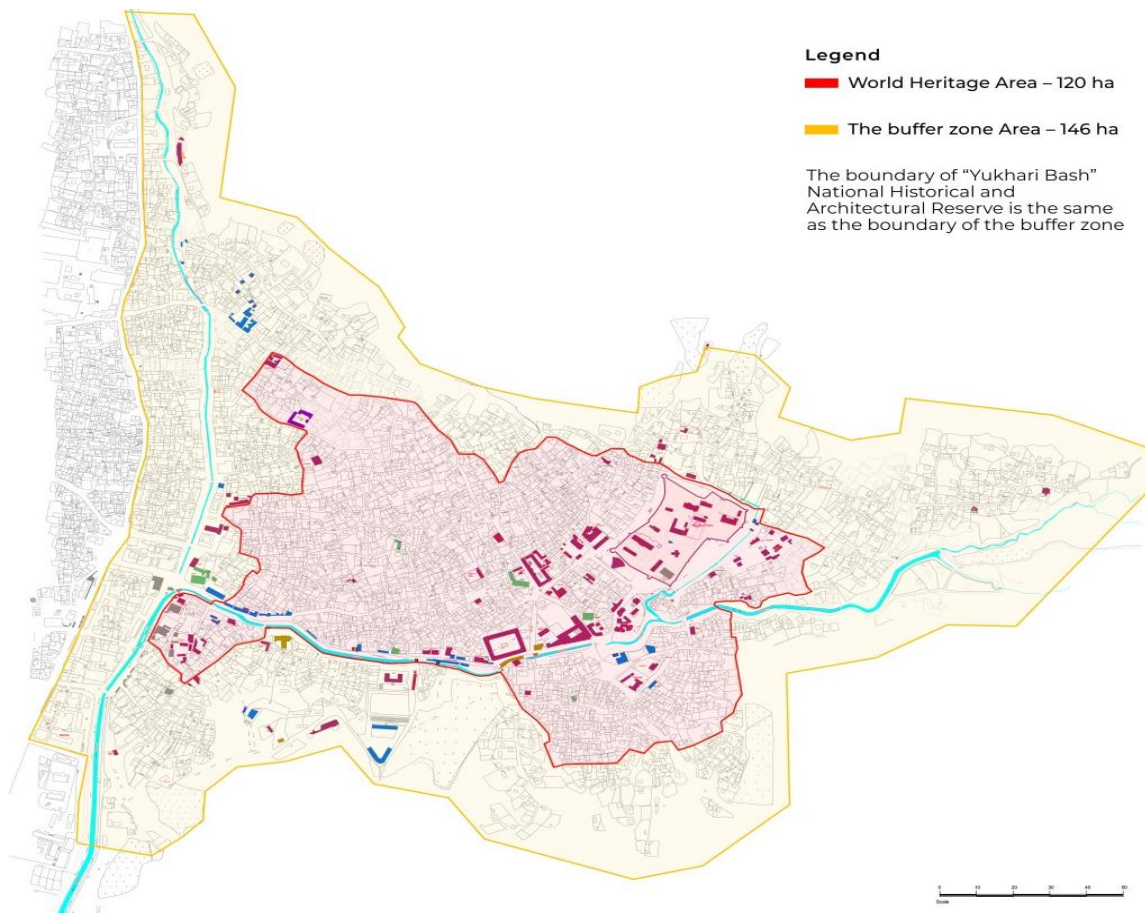
1.1. General information

The city of Sheki is located in northwest Azerbaijan and is the center of the administrative district of Sheki. Located in the southern part of the Greater Caucasus Mountain range, Sheki is 240 km from Baku. The population of Sheki was 68,400, as of 2020. The city boasts cozy cobblestone streets with artisans' shops and medieval architecture and is surrounded by scenic mountain landscapes. Its fine cuisine and rich craftsmanship traditions, as well as the unique sense of humor of the people of Sheki, have gained popularity both in the country and beyond.



Image 1.1 The city of Sheki

The city of Sheki consists of two main parts – the northern part extending into the mountains, and the eastern part along the Gurjanachay River. The city center is dotted with an architectural ensemble of traditional houses, with high gabled roofs covered with brown-red tiles. Traces of Safavid, Qajar, and Russian building techniques can be seen throughout Sheki's architecture due to its location along important historic trade routes, such as the ancient Silk Road. The Khan's Palace as well as the various merchant's houses reflect the wealth generated by silkworm breeding and trading of cocoons in Sheki in the late 19th century. Today, the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Map 1. The boundaries of World Heritage Site in Sheki

Nowadays, the district of Sheki has a small silk industry and relies on its agricultural sector. The city of Sheki is a popular tourism destination for local and international visitors. Its proximity to the Georgian border makes it attractive for visitors from Georgia too.

1.2 Historical background

Sheki is located on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountains, amid woods and mountain rivers. The first evidence of human settlement in this area dates to 2,500 years ago, making it one of the oldest settlements in the Caucasus region.

Throughout its history, Sheki has been a part of different states and regimes and been under various foreign cultural influences, the traces of which, in combination with the local traditions, have formed a unique cultural identity. Handicraft production and high standards of craftsmanship have always been defining features of this identity.

Craftsmanship traditions of Sheki are linked with the fertile land and water, mild climate, and industrious and skillful people of this land. The abundance of raw materials necessary for the

development of crafts such as fibrous plants, wool, silk, leather, sheepskin, wood, clay, mineral and plant-based dyes, and other resources has also played a significant role in this development.



Image 1.2 Ceramic-roofed traditional houses on a mountain slope

There is little information about the crafts industry of Sheki in the Middle Ages and its development can be judged mainly by the archeological finds. However, records starting from the 19th century are quite specific about the size of this industry. As such, there were 235 hat makers, 178 leather tanners, 147 shoemakers, 154 tailors, and 41 silversmiths in Sheki in 1848. Another source states that there were 1735 artisans in Sheki in 1861, which was one of the highest numbers not only in Azerbaijan but in the entire Russian Empire, which Azerbaijan was a part of at the time.¹ These artisans could well address the domestic demand and were active exporters of their goods, as Sheki was already a commercial and trade hub connecting Dagestan, north-west, and south of Azerbaijan all the way to Iran.

The peak of the socio-economic development and most achievements in trade and craftsmanship happened during the period of the Sheki Khanate (1743-1819). The Khanate emerged following the siege of the city by the troops of Nadir Shah, during which the ruler of Sheki Haji Chalabi (1743-1755) kept the army and the people of this region at the unreachable fortress known as Gələrsən-Görərsən – Come and see yourself. Nadir Shah completely destroyed the city during

¹ "Sheki, the town of craftsmen". A. N. Mustafayev, Baku-Elm, 1987

the long months of siege, but he could not break the will of these people, who masterfully rebuilt it.

In fact, apart from the military attacks, Sheki has been destroyed many times by floods throughout its history. One of the deadliest happened in 1772, after which the city had to be rebuilt completely from scratch.



Image 1.3 Abdulsalam underground hammam in Sheki

The Khan's Palace and many other historical buildings, which are now UNESCO World Heritage Sites, belong to the period of Sheki Khanate. It was a time of flourishing and development for the city. This period also marks the development of the sericulture and textile industry in Sheki, which played a significant role in the formation of the city as we know it today.

In 1819, Sheki Khanate became a part of the Russian Empire and lost its sovereignty. During this time, and as part of the Soviet Union later, Sheki was a major industrial hub and a center for textiles and many other crafts.

1.3 Cultural mapping in Sheki

1.3.1 Tangible cultural assets of Sheki

According to the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on taking tangible historical and cultural monuments of Azerbaijan under state protection based on their degree of importance (Decision no 132), in Sheki, there are two architectural and archeological monuments of universal, 14 of national, and 90 of local importance in Sheki region². The historical part of Sheki with Sheki Khan's Palace is protected by "Yukhari Bash" Reserve and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2019. "Kish" Historical-Architectural Reserve with the Albanian Christian temple is also an important monument under protection. Other than that, 154 cultural-educational institutions under the Ministry of Culture currently operate in Sheki region, including 5 children's music schools, 11 museums, as well as parks, culture clubs, and libraries³.



Image 1.4 Albanian temple at "Kish" historical-architectural reserve. Source: Reserves Management Center

² https://e-qanun.az/framework/2847#_edn3

³ <http://sheki-ih.gov.az/az/page/16.html>

1.3.2 Intangible cultural assets of Sheki: Craftsmanship

An abundance of raw materials, skilled craftspeople, and favorable location on major trade routes connecting Tiflis and Derbent have stimulated the development of craftsmanship traditions in Sheki. Today, the city continues to produce and export silk, wood and metalwork, confectionery, jewelry, pottery, and other goods. In fact, many quarters in the historical part of the city still bear the names of crafts such as Duluslar (potters), Zargarlar (jewelers), Halvachilar (halva-makers), and others.

Sericulture and embroidery

Textile production, especially silk-making has been a stimulating factor in the development of Sheki as a city. Sericulture gained an industrial scale in the 15th century and silk from Sheki was favored for its quality and durability. Until recently, most households were engaged in the cultivation of silkworms, many of whom also produced raw silk and silk products. In fact, the ground floor of many traditional houses was typically used for silkworm breeding and silk production. Silk making made up a large part of the city economy as many other crafts silk-spinning – *şərbafliq*, and other associated crafts such as dying, braid making, and embroidery, were also widespread. It suffices to mention that yet in the middle of the last century in the Sheki province about 14 thousand families were engaged in silkworm breeding and got annually about 15 thousand pods of raw silk amounting to almost half of the production in the entire South Caucasus region.



The first silk manufactory in Azerbaijan was established here in 1829, which continues to produce silk fabrics, scarves, carpets, as well as raw silk and natural dyes today. It is the biggest supplier of raw silk for **kəlağayi** – women's headscarf and an important element of the traditional costume.

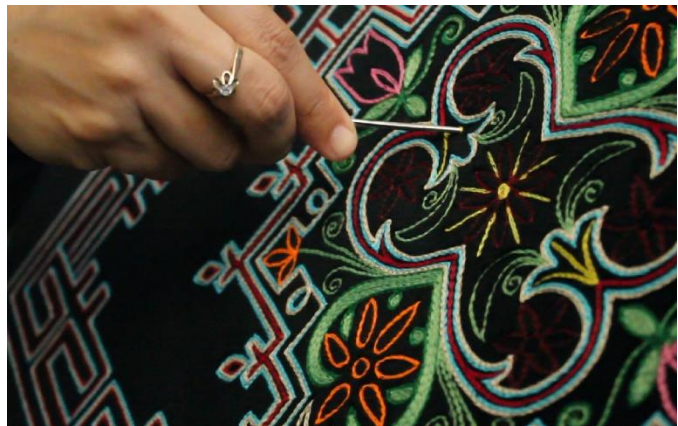
Traditional art and symbolism of Kelaghayi, making and wearing women's silk headscarves is an intangible cultural heritage element of Azerbaijan.⁴ The carves are colored using plant-based dyes and decorated manually using wood molds. The variety of patterns depends on the imagination of the craftsman, although in fact there are certain traditional canons.

⁴ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-art-and-symbolism-of-kelaghayi-making-and-wearing-womens-silk-headscarves-00669>



Image 1.5 Kelaghayi master Amiraslan Shamilov

Embroidery is another popular type of handicraft in Sheki. Local or imported velvet and other types of thick fabrics in red, black, dark blue, and other colors were used as a background for intricate decorative elements sewn with silk threads. The most popular style was the chain-stitched *təkalduz* embroidery, which could be found on women's traditional costumes, as well as cushions, bath rugs, counterpanes, and other household textiles. *Güləbətın* (goldwork) is made using gold or silver threads. Quilting was used to make *araqçın* (skullcap), *şabkulax* (nightcap), prayer rugs, and other garments. Horse accessories and shoes were also decorated with embroidery and in the early 19th century, there were 22 shops in Sheki making horse accessories and 50 shoe shops.



Embroidery from Sheki was highly valued in other parts of the Caucasus region, Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, and some samples even reached western Europe. Alexander Duma the father, who visited Azerbaijan in the mid-19th century, mentioned in his notes: “In Sheki, I bought two saddles with embroidery for 24 rubles. In France it would be impossible to buy such saddles even for 200 Francs. Frankly speaking, no money can buy you such saddles in France”.

Shabaka

Şəbəkə (shabaka), which literally means network in the Azerbaijani language, is another kind of traditional craft that Sheki is well known for. The Palace of Sheki Khans and many other prominent



historical buildings in the city, as well as other parts of Azerbaijan, feature şəbəkə consisting of small pieces of wood network holding colorful Venetian glass, which together form complex geometric shapes. Used as the windows of most such buildings, light passing through the şəbəkə creates delicate colorful shadows inside the building. Sheki Khan's Palace features the intricate pieces of **şəbəkə** on its windows. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the finest examples of 19th century palace architecture of Gajar style. The façade of the palace overlooking a lush garden and the mountain views of Sheki is made of large şəbəkə windows. Each square meter of these stained-glass windows is made of around seven thousand pieces. Apart from the şəbəkə windows, the palace has several mirror balconies, and its interiors are covered with delicate murals, decorated niches, woodwork, and mosaics.



Image 1.6 Interiors of Sheki khan's Palace with şəbəkə windows and the colorful projections of light passing through them

Confectionary and gastronomy



One of the trademarks of Sheki is **Şəki halvası** – a mix of nuts and honey sherbet packed between crunchy rice crusts and ornated with red stripes made of saffron water. It is a tradition to take a box of such dessert home when visiting Sheki. Other confectionary types are bamiyə, tel hava, qırmabadam, külçə, ovma, peşvənk, etc. made with nuts, sherbets, saffron, and other spices, rice flour and others are common ingredients. Making traditional Sheki sweets is usually a family tradition and the last names of these families have become brands.

The gastronomy of Sheki is considered one of the richest in Azerbaijan. Piti is another trademark of this city. This hearty stew of meat with chickpeas and dried plums slow cooked in clay bowls called dopu, has traditionally been the food of the working class.

Pottery

Azerbaijan ranks first in the world in the clay palette. For centuries, Sheki has been especially famous for its clay. Located on Great Silk Road Sheki was always one of the important cultural and trading hubs at the whole Caucasus region. Geo-climatic location of this oldest city of Azerbaijan with beautiful natural surroundings and plenty of different types of raw materials - clay, timber, river stone, etc. influenced the development of a wide range of crafts. The techniques and knowledge have been preserved and delivered from forefathers to nowadays through the ages. The wood-burning stoves found here during excavations testify to the high skill of ancient ceramists, as well as pottery masters. Numerous pottery items that were found during archaeological excavations are exhibited in different local museums now.

There is a "Duluslar" (Potters) neighborhood in the highlands of Sheki city and there are quite a few famous pottery masters and families living and having workshops in this neighborhood. These families were able to preserve



old techniques and still produce products in a very traditional way. Just by wandering around the workshops, you can see an old oven, old pottery wheel, and other elements of pottery art.

Jewelry

Known as one of the most famous handicraft trade centers in Azerbaijan, Sheki flourished in jewelry art. Gold coins used in money circulation were an inexhaustible source of raw materials for Sheki jewelers. The latter always had the precious metal in stock and in the required quantity. Customers also had enough coins for settlements, which made it even easier to supply jewelry shops with raw materials. In turn, this stimulated interest in jewelry and craftsmanship. The ruling class, especially women from noble families, were the main buyers of jewelry stores and buyers of gold items.

Hatmaking



The hat makers of Sheki provided for the needs of both local population and neighboring regions. There was a certain specialization among the masters associated with peculiarities of production of various types of the head gear. Some of them worked with the locally produced skins, others made various kinds of the papakhas from the Astrakhan (dagga, cherkezi). In old times, the Astrakhan hats were in great demand among urban dwellers. The hats were of various shapes, e.g. "chapba, galami, ahikari". There were masters who made turbans for seids, efendi, gadji. These turbans were worn at certain periods, especially by those who returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The hat shops are still in existence in Sheki. In one of them which is under the supervision of the town's service works, a skilful hatter Mustafa Ragim ogly Alimov continues the traditions of his forefathers. His national headgear is famous far beyond the area of Sheki. Together with the master Nenat Maned ogly Ibrahim Khalilov he daily produces hats which are greatly popular among the customers.

Image 1.3 The hatmaker Mamedov in front of his shop in Sheki

Carpentry



Woodwork was one of the most widespread crafts in Sheki. Decorations on the wooden surface were made mainly via three techniques: carving, shebeke, and metal carving. The most beautiful artwork of woodcarving is found on doors, windows, railings, wooden columns, and several household items in Sheki. These carved doors were decorated with floral and geometric patterns, various inscriptions and symbolic paintings. Wood is also used to make different household items, one of which is dowry box making. The tradition of making a dowry box still lives on in Sheki. In the past, brides used to take their dowries to their husbands' houses in these boxes. The dowry box is made of special wood and decorated with patterns. Many dowry boxes are also passed down from generation to generation and preserved in Sheki.

Today, carpentry as an artwork has been developed in various directions. Some craftsmen work only by hand, and some have acquired new technologies and thus, can fulfill more complex orders in a short time. The masters working manually are mostly tourist-oriented and they are engaged in the production of small-scale items, such as souvenirs. However, industrialization affects this sphere that there are a considerable number of carpentry workshops carrying out large-scale orders with its fast technological base. Furthermore, plenty of new industrial products replace the need for wooden handicraft items.

Metalworking

The barrels of flintlock guns were often unthreaded, so the fine shot was used with them. A small shot was cut from lead strung over a wire. Gunpowder made in the village of Keynyuk was usually used for guns of this type. A powder flask made of wood or bone was kept together pottery, widespread here, partly reduced the production of copper products, but still could not completely replace it. Portable copper utensils were in great demand not only among the townspeople but also among the elite cattle breeders. In the middle of the last century, there were 9 coppersmiths and 22 tinsmiths in Sheki, who made a wide range of copper products. In Sheki shops, located in the Lahij and Yukharybash quarters, ordinary copper utensils "hara" and ornamented - "izafe" were made. At the beginning of the 20th century, the copper workshops of the mouth of Suleiman and his sons Aliashraf, Pasha, Teymur, Ilyas were in the Lahij quarter, and the workshop of the mouth of Eyyub was in the upper part of the city. Currently, there are several copper and tin workshops in Sheki. The constant echo of hammering, coming from the workshop of Bagyr Yusif ogly Mustafayev, always reminds us of the enduring and enduring nature of this ancient folk craft. The young master Yusif Alakbar ogly continues his work with inspiration, flaming sparks fly from the la, engaged in the traditional business in of their ancestors, tin workshops, and the ringing of his hammer beckons.

1.3.3 Cultural activities, project, and events

International recognition

Sheki owes its reputation as crafts capital to dozens of crafts practices in Sheki today. Of them, the art of making kelaghayi, as well as the musical instruments tar and kamancha are **UNESCO-listed as intangible cultural heritage of Azerbaijan**.⁵

Sheki is a member of **UNESCO Creative Cities Network** since 2017 under the category of Crafts and Folk Art. This membership has created an additional chance for the city to connect with other similar cities in the world, as well as support the production and innovation of traditional crafts and cultural tourism.

In 2020, the city also joined the **European Route of Ceramics**. Ceramics, especially pottery-making is an ancient tradition in Sheki embedded in the local architecture and gastronomic traditions. In 2019, ABAD Center for Ceramics and Applied Art organized an International Ceramics Symposium bringing together renowned ceramic artists from all over the world with local talents.

UNESCO-recognized policy documents and plans:

Inclusion of the historical part of Sheki in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019 brought about several policy plans in line with the requirements of the World Heritage Committee addressing conservation, restoration, regeneration and management issues of the site. These documents are the Conservation Master Plan, Restoration Manual, Management Plan, and Urban Regeneration Plan developed by the Reserves Management Center, “Yukhari Bash” Reserve, and key stakeholders.

The five-year (2020-2024) **Management Plan** is a key planning tool for the development, conservation, use, and preservation of the heritage site. The main aim of the Management Plan is to describe the vision and mission for the conservation management of the Historic Centre of Sheki for the future and determine key targets and strategies, projects, action plans, and application tools for its preservation and sustainability development. The Management Plan also aims at identifying partners (stakeholders), responsible structures and institutions, as well as relevant sources for the implementation of the management process. The main objective of the Management Plan is to manage the heritage site in line with the requirements encompassing the history and paving the way for future opportunities while preserving the irreplaceable cultural heritage of Sheki.

The role of the **Conservation Master Plan** is to ensure the conservation, restoration, and relevant use of the Outstanding Universal Values of the cultural heritage of Sheki. The conservation plan envisages the development of a general strategy for long-term conservation and proper treatment of the monuments within the WHS.

Restoration Manual prepared by the former Ministry of Culture and Tourism and IPOGEA Traditional Knowledge Hub (2018) was revised and adopted by the State Tourism Agency in 2020, covering the architectural elements and construction typologies of the Site, their main

⁵ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/azerbaijan-AZ?info=elements-on-the-lists>

issues, and relevant prescriptions. The architectural typology of traditional residential houses, as well as the distinctive form of traditional buildings, material use, scale, and garden-house structure, are broadly discussed in the Restoration Manual.

The manual has been presented to and distributed among local heritage specialists, civil engineers, architects, and other parties.

The Urban Regeneration Plan was developed to respond to the problem of urban decay in the historical part of Sheki with the action plans of short- and long-term perspectives. It is notable that Restoration Manual, Conservation Plan, and Management Plan are fundamental to the Urban Regeneration Plan in which urban development vision and main development directions are elaborated. Any changes and development projects on the site should be based on the main principles of these documents.

Production activities

ABAD Center for Ceramics and Applied Arts was created in 2019 to not only revive ceramics tradition of Sheki, but also to develop the ceramics industry of Sheki by bringing up a new generation of artists and popularizing this craft. The center is equipped with state-of-an-art infrastructure and local masters here to receive orders from all over Azerbaijan.

Another important production unit in Sheki is **Azerlpek Silk Factory** which produces raw silk, kelaghayi, silk carpets, and other goods made of silk. Azerlpek receives state and private orders for making silk goods and has a small shop and display area for their production. The building of Azerlpek dates to 1931, which used to be the biggest silk production unit in the Caucasus region. Today, only a small part of this plant functions.

Crafts production in Sheki is not limited to industrial units. Silk and kelaghayi production, shabaka, woodcarving and carpentry, hat making and leatherworking, metalworking, jewelry, confectionary, soap and rose water production, pottery, and other crafts are still practiced in private workshops and studios. The majority of these shops are concentrated in the historical part of the city, easing the tourism offer. The House of Artisans, which is located within the fortress and on the ground floor of Sheki Caravanserai facing Akhundov Street has the largest concentration of crafts shops. As a part of a recent initiative, a map of Sheki with artisans' shops has been issued by Sheki DMO. The map has listed 23 crafts shops in the historical part of Sheki, as well as facts about the crafts and practical information on masterclasses. The map is downloadable at the website of the Azerbaijan Tourism Board, or hard copies can be obtained at the TIC and **Sheki DMOs**.

CHAPTER 1. Introduction: Sheki and its Cultural Mapping



Map 2. Sheki artisans map developed by Azerbaijan Tourism Board and Sheki DMO⁶

[illegible]

⁶ <https://azerbaijan.travel/regional-maps>

Design Connections project

The project was developed in 2020-2021 by the State Tourism Agency of Azerbaijan Republic in collaboration with an Italian designer. In a country with a rich and unique cultural heritage like Azerbaijan, where the local artisans have created a rich and distinctive material tradition, touristic products, ethnic products, and souvenirs can be a sustainable source of income for a good percentage of the villages labor force. Within this context, the project, represented by a wide range of handicrafts, such as chasing, jewelry making, engraving in metal, carving in wood, stone and bone, carpet-making, lacing, pattern weaving and printing, knitting and embroidery, can be integrated into the national and international supply chains of the ethnic products and handicrafts and design items, through increasing the competitiveness and market penetration opportunities.

The main idea was to promote more active development of local traditional crafts in such historical reserves as Sheki, Basqal and Lahij. Also, the purpose of the project was to create the ground for a rethinking of traditional crafts and creating new products for the local market.

The designer divided the project in two parts: the research part and the design part. During the project, he visited the above-mentioned places and had several meetings with local craftsmen at their workshops. The research part aimed to first document existing local crafts and their state. For this purpose, the overall mapping of the crafts and artisans was done. Also, based on these data “Artisan map of Sheki” was developed for the tourists. Then the research was focused more on revealing the techniques of each craft.

After all the research was done, the design process started. As a result, a design catalog of new crafts products was prepared and presented to the State Tourism Agency. The newly designed products are intended to be produced by local artisans; however, this process hasn't been implemented due to numerous factors. Below are some examples of the new crafts products:



Festivals and events

Every year, Sheki hosts several cultural events and festivals.

Crafts festival has been celebrated every year since 2007. Each year a different topic chosen, such as silk, culinary, folk arts, etc. The festival attracts visitors from the capital, including the staff of different foreign embassies in Baku. In some years, the festival also hosted craftspeople from the sister city of Gabrovo in Bulgaria. This is a great chance for the local artisans to showcase their work and increase sales, while contributing to the social and cultural life of the local community. The festival is organized by the Executive Authority in cooperation with other stakeholders.

Silk Road International Music Festival has been organized since 2010. The festival organized by the City Executive Authority brings together folk ensembles of different Silk Road countries like Turkey, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and others. The festival takes place at the open-air theatre near the city fortress.

Restoration and renovation projects

The Reserves Management Center and “Yukhari Bash” Reserve are currently implementing major restoration and renovation projects in the historical part of Sheki. Restoration and renovations work at the following buildings are ongoing or are planned in the near future:

- Khan Mosque and its yard with the royal cemetery
- Façade and interiors of Sheki Art Gallery building. The facilities and infrastructure of the building will be modernized
- Former Ophthalmology Hospital to become the administrative building of “Yukhari-Bash” Reserve
- Building next to the Khan’s Palace to be used as a public space. The building will have an auditorium, exhibition space, café, meeting room, etc.
- History and Local Lore Museum. The infrastructure and facilities will be modernized.
- Tofiq Rasulov’s shabaka workshop
- Shekikhanovs’ House. Ethnography Museum demonstrating the life and lore of a royal family in Sheki in the 19th century will be established here.
- Lower Caravanserai. The building is planned to be repurposed as a multifunctional community center for organizing food courts, fairs, open-air events, and other activities.
- Aghvanlar public hammam
- Dara hammam. There is no clear plan about its functionality.
- The building of the former “Sock Artel”. There is no clear plan about its functionality.
- The House of Artisans in the former prison. Today the building functions as a space where local artisans have set up their shops and display areas, but due to administrative problems the space does not function as a creative hub, as it was initially planned.

The authorities of RMC and “Yukhari Bash” Reserve have put forward the following action plan regarding the reusing of abandoned, half-ruined, underused, and unused buildings:

1. Register the buildings as monuments (when possible)

2. Develop monument passports
3. Define the new purpose of the buildings within the legal framework
4. Set out the measures for the prevention of illegal and irregular interference and use by locals and entrepreneurs
5. Develop initial restoration and design projects
6. Discuss and confirm the project and plans with the local community and authorities
7. Start the implementation of the restoration projects

Despite the scale of the renovation projects and substantial investment allocated for it by the state, often the future functionality and management mechanisms of these spaces are missing in the action plan. One of the main purposes of this CDS is to allow the CCI use these spaces and establish PPP-style management mechanisms within these buildings

1.4 Tourism potential of Sheki



Both the tangible and intangible heritage of Sheki demonstrates its strong tourism potential. The integration of traditional crafts into the tourism industry will help preserve Azerbaijan's intangible cultural heritage as well as boost the creative industry in Sheki.

There are six historic mosques and two minarets without mosques, two church buildings, three bathhouses, nine factories and one workshop, two caravanserais, seven museums, hotels, and several shops selling traditional craft products in Sheki.

Sheki also has strong tourist potential as a place where the living traditions of craftsmanship still exist. Many artisans and craftspeople work and sell their hand-made products in the city territory.

The intangible heritage of Sheki includes its distinctive local cuisine and other cultural treasures such as UNESCO-designated Chovqan games.

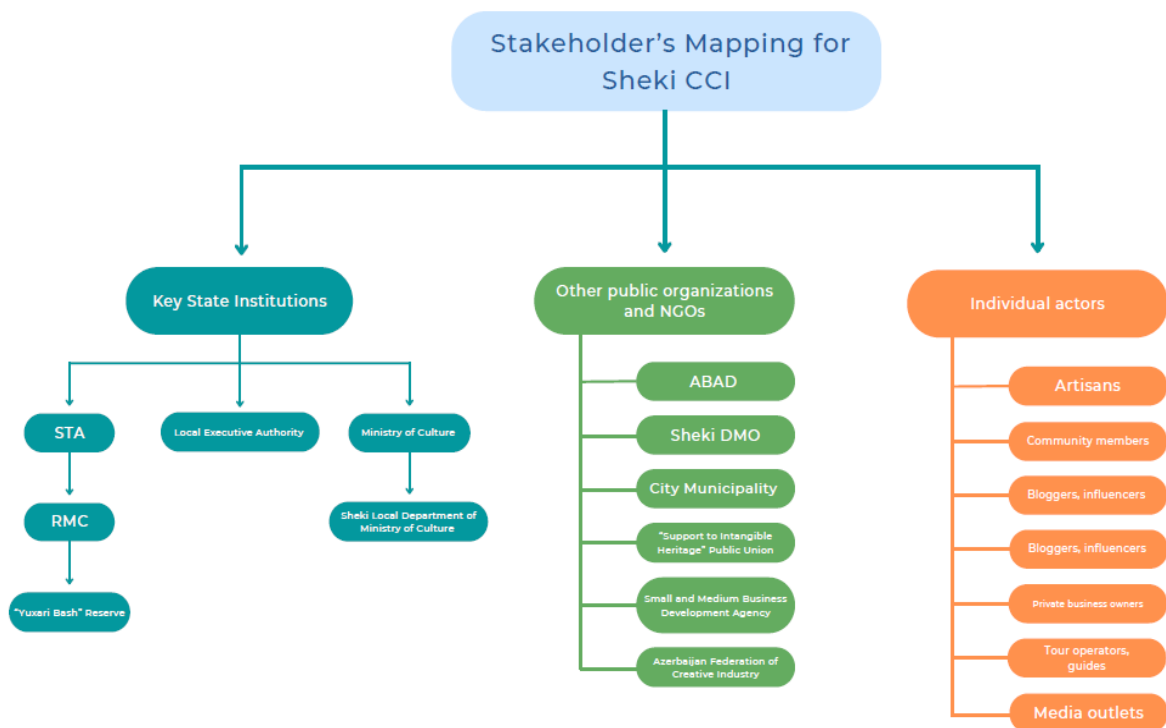
The region also serves some of Azerbaijan's tastiest and unique cuisine, with two of the most beloved being Sheki halva (baklava) and piti, a stew created with meat and potatoes and prepared in a terracotta pot.

The historical part of Sheki is full of possibilities for new activities that could be commodified for visitors. In 2018, approximately 62.000 tourists from various countries visited Sheki mainly during the spring-summer season.

STA has developed a Tourism Development Plan for Sheki. The plan considers the current market trends in the tourism industry. Infrastructure projects and the provision of amenities are essential for tourism, but their development in Sheki requires at the beginning of the process an extensive investment. That's why direct government action or support of Azerbaijani authorities, both on the national and the local level will be an expression of the governmental will to support the development of the targeted tourism products in the city.

Given the huge resources of tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets, the city will cater its attention to culturally interested visitors: this includes history, architecture, culinary, traditional craftsmanship, local daily life experience, etc. The natural resources will round up a set of activities that include the cultural landscape with short hiking routes, and the local environment such as flora, fauna, and endemic animals.

1.5 Stakeholder mapping



Sheki City Executive Authority

Sheki City Executive Authority is the main local executive power that is responsible for the following actions in the field of culture according to its Statute:

- *organizing the analysis and forecasting of the development of the cultural sphere in their respective territories, and submitting relevant proposals to the relevant central executive authorities*
- *establishing conditions for the organization of leisure time of residents and provision of services by cultural organizations in their respective territories*
- *supporting the development of state cultural institutions and the activities of other cultural institutions in their respective territories*
- *undertaking the control over the organization of library services in their respective territories*
- *supporting folk art, and providing conditions for the development of local traditional folk art*
- *analyzing the state of the provision of the population with the services of cultural institutions, undertaking measures to improve the level of cultural services in their respective territories, and submitting relevant proposals to the relevant central executive authorities*

State Tourism Agency

The State Tourism Agency (STA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established by Presidential order on April 20, 2018. Several cultural sites, including “Yukhari Bash” national historical and architectural reserve have been included in the subordination of STA.

According to its regulation, STA has the following rights and duties in relation to its subordinated reserves:

- *to exercise state control and state monitoring delegated to its powers by law in the territories of reserves*
- *to organize efficient use of cultural, natural, and historical heritage properties which are in the territories of the reserves and are tourist attractions*
- *to give consent to the projects for the use, adaptation, and restoration of the state- or municipality-owned immovable architectural monuments of national and local importance, privately owned real estate, and their sections (except for archaeological sites) located in the territories of the reserves when they are leased for scientific, cultural, religious, service and tourism purposes on a contractual basis*
- *to give consent to the privatization of state-owned architectural monuments of local significance in the territories of the reserves*
- *to give consent for demolition, deconstruction, decomposition, reconstruction, relocation and change of the appearance of cultural heritage properties that were assigned with preventive protection*
- *to give consent for the beautification works in the territories of the reserves, and the reconstruction works in the protection zones of the monument*
- *to give consent for changing the function of the residential areas of the immovable historical and cultural monuments under state protection to the non-residential area or vice versa*
- *to give consent for the construction in the protection zones of the immovable historical and cultural monuments in the territories of the reserves in accordance with the Urban Planning and Construction Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan*
- *to give consent for and control the implementation of the maintenance, repair, restoration, reconstruction, and regeneration works in the privately-owned monuments in the territories of the reserves*
- *to make an inventory of the historical and architectural monuments and buildings in the territories of the reserves, carry out technical certification within its competencies and submit proposals for the relevant lists on the degrees of the significance of monuments*
- *to compile the list of and state register the historical and cultural monuments in the territories of the reserves, to issue monument certificates (passports)*
- *to develop tourism, identify tourist routes, develop, maintain and preserve tourism infrastructure in the territories of the reserves*
- *to make decisions on the conservation, renovation, restoration, reconstruction, and regeneration of the state- and municipality-owned monuments in the territories of the reserves.*

Ministry of Culture and its regional Sheki department

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan is the central executive authority enforcing state policies and regulations on culture, arts, preservation of historical and cultural monuments, publishing, and filmmaking, etc.

The Ministry of Culture regulates its activities in the regions, as well as in Sheki through its local departments. The responsibilities of the local units are:

- *developing and ensuring the implementation of the programs and action plans for the development and implementation of cultural policies in the city (district)*
- *undertaking comprehensive analysis and prognostication of the main directions of the development of the cultural sphere*
- *organizing large-scale cultural events, memorial events, theatre performances, concerts, conferences, consultations, seminars, and meetings, fairs and exhibitions, festivals, competitions, and other events, as well as film screenings.*

Reserve Management Center (Lead applicant)

Reserves Management Center (RMC) was established on June 7, 2018 (Decision No. 255 of Cabinet of Ministries) as a subordinate body of the State Tourism Agency. RMC is a public legal entity engaged in scientific, historical, and cultural study, promotion, purposeful use, preservation and development of historical and cultural heritage assets and monuments in the territories of the state reserves subordinated to the State Tourism Agency and increasing the tourism potential of these reserves. Article 2 of the Statute lists the areas of activities of RMC as:

- *preserving historical and cultural monuments, and cultural heritage in the reserves*
- *researching the monuments from historical and cultural points of view while ensuring their integrity and maintaining the protection regime for the territories of the reserves*
- *ensuring tourism-friendly uses of the reserves*
- *ensuring the financial viability of the reserves, and seeking the diversification of funding sources*
- *ensuring sustainable management of the reserves*
- *participating in the implementation of the unified state policy concerning the reserves*
- *organizing planning, control and coordination of the activities concerning the reserves*
- *organizing their purposeful functioning of the monuments in the territories of the reserves*
- *ensuring the preservation and integrity of the monuments in the territories of the reserves*
- *organizing development and management of tourism infrastructure in the territories of the reserves.*

“Yukhari Bash” National Historical and Architectural Reserve (Co-Applicant)

“Yukhari Bash” Reserve, established in 1967, operates under the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The reserve is guided in accordance with its regulation. The reserve is a state-funded organization. It covers a 283 ha area – the historical part of Sheki.



Map 5. “Yukhari Bash” National Historical and Architectural Reserve

The reserve:

- undertakes state control over the territory of the reserve within the powers provided by the legislation
- *Submits project proposals to the RMC regarding conservation, beautification, restoration, reconstruction, and regeneration works as well as cultural tourism-related projects in the reserve area, including an adaptation of abandoned historical buildings for the relevant use*
- *Organizes recreation areas, green zones, and traffic in the reserve territory and takes relevant measures in accordance with the legislation and in conjunction with the RMC to restrict or prohibit the installation of pipelines, power grids and other engineering and communication lines, as well as the movement of traffic in the areas close to the monuments or in their protection zones if they pose a threat to the protection of monuments*
- *supervises the implementation of the projects together with RMC and the project author(s)*
- *Develops, together with the RMC, the inventory of the monuments and buildings within the boundaries of the reserve and in its protection zone in accordance with the legislation*
- *Implements relevant measures in accordance with the procedure established by the RMC to ensure the protection and inviolability of historical and cultural monuments in the reserve territory, and appeals to the RMC to prevent the violation of the rules of monument use and the protection regime in the reserve, and to ensure to those necessary measures are taken in accordance with the legislation for bringing the perpetrators to the liability*
- *Organizes scientific research together with relevant scientific organizations and in coordination with the STA, and involves specialists in the discovery and study of monuments; the excavation and discovery of archaeological monuments in the reserve*

territory with the participation of the RMC is permitted after the approval of the National Academy of Sciences and registration with the STA; historical and cultural monuments and artifacts discovered during archaeological excavations in the reserve territory are handed over to the reserve collection

- *Promotes the scientific, cultural, and historical significance of monuments, and organizes fairs and exhibitions, photo exhibitions, excursions, lectures, making documentaries and short films, and publication of scientific and popular literature with the organizational support of the RMC*
- *Supervises the implementation of research proposals provided that their methodology complies with the requirements of the protection regime of the reserve*

Currently, the reserve management has 30 staff members and 9 employees at the expense of special funds: one director and one deputy director, one architect, one chief accountant, two researchers, one chief guardian of the collection, one artist-restorer, eight monument guardians, three guides; and remaining 20 employees are caretakers, ticket sellers, secretaries, drivers, gardeners, workers, and security guards.

Sheki Municipality

Article 4 of Law on the status of municipalities stipulates that municipalities engage in local social development programs, underlining that “the purpose of social development programs is to address issues of social development of local significance that are not provided for in the social development programs implemented by the state or is an addition to them”. These programs include several areas including “assistance in the development of cultural institutions, preservation of historical and cultural monuments”, and other areas of local infrastructure.

Municipal properties, that are managed by the municipality, include the local budget formed from local taxes and fees, extra-budgetary funds, municipal real estate, as well as municipal lands, municipal enterprises and organizations, municipal housing and non-residential buildings, non-state and non-private roads, municipal educational, healthcare, cultural and sports facilities, and other movable and immovable properties.

The municipality may engage in overseas economic activities for the benefit of the local population in the manner prescribed by law.

“Support of Intangible Cultural Heritage” public association

The Sheki-based public association was established in 2020 with the purpose of supporting the protection and development of the intangible cultural heritage and cultural industry of Sheki. The intangible heritage of Sheki is very rich varying from centuries-old folk applied arts and traditional decorative arts, national fine arts, folk music and dances, national games, and performances.

The main mission of the Association is to develop various fields of traditional arts and crafts existing in Sheki, to raise the role of arts and crafts in the preservation, development, and promotion of cultural heritage, and to achieve solutions to socio-economic problems of artisans and craftspeople. Moreover, the association aims to support the craftsmen of Sheki by fostering their organizational skills in protecting, developing, and promoting the heritage and meeting the needs of modern times.

Another dimension of the association is to develop proposals based on the opinion and advice of the urban community, intellectuals, and elders, and to meet regularly to discuss the heritage-related issues and the impact of tourism on the urban life of Sheki.

The activity of the association was halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic's restrictions that happened right after its establishment. However, the association reorganizes itself and has relevant plans regarding the heritage conservation and development of CCI in Sheki.

Prior to this organization, there was an association named Sheki Artisan Association, which has had some endeavors in developing Sheki's artisans and crafting area. The former jail building in the Yukhari Bash Reserve area (within the Fortress) was restored in 2005 and turned into the first and only business incubator in Azerbaijan for the artisans and craftspeople under the name of the House of Artisans by the Sheki Artisans Association. Necessary tools, equipment, and other auxiliary instruments were purchased and donated for the use of the artisans and craftspeople. Each artisan or craftsman working in the House paid 5% of his/her income into the account of the Association based on a contract. As a result, today masters of 18 arts and crafts continue to work in the House, producing handicrafts and offering them to tourists, and receiving and completing different orders. However, the Association has suspended its activities since 2012.

ABAD Center



ABAD Center for Ceramics and Applied Arts was created in 2019 to not only revive ceramics tradition of Sheki, but also to develop the ceramics industry of Sheki by bringing up a new generation of artists and popularizing this craft. The center is equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure and local masters here to receive orders from all over Azerbaijan.

The main purpose of establishing the organization is to carry out socially-oriented projects aimed at ensuring the active participation of the citizens in the socio-economic life of the country,

developing small and medium entrepreneurship, raising the employment rate of the population and supporting the formation of competitive family businesses in the country. “ABAD” canters implement assistance projects for family businesses engaged in arts and agriculture.

They also provide business planning, equipment, marketing, training courses, branding and design, financial accounting, and legal assistance services to family households.

KOBIA

Small and Medium Business Development Agency under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (KOBIA) was established in 2017. It aims at supporting the development and participation in the regulation of micro, small and medium enterprises in the country, protecting the interests and solving the problems of these business entities, and providing them with a number of services, including coordinating the services of public and private institutions in the relevant area. The Agency issues grants and assists SMEs to find financial resources from the commercial banks. Moreover, it actively organizes capacity-building activities for SMEs and provides individual consultations for developing their projects.



Creative Industry Federation



Created in 2019 with the support of the Ministry of Culture, the Federation provides awareness and propaganda activities in the field of creative and cultural industries, local production of creative products and services, and supports the fertile ecosystem necessary for the development of creative and cultural industries in Azerbaijan. promotes promotion and export.

The purpose of creating this platform is to provide support to sectoral development processes, as well as to create the necessary environment for the creation of the "Creative Azerbaijan" brand in the future. In the future, this brand will support the coordinated implementation of activities to promote and sell local creative products and services of Azerbaijan in the country and abroad, to reveal the creative potential of these industries in our country and its sustainable promotion.

DMO

Sheki DMO was created in 2019 for coordinating, promoting, and managing the sustainable development of regional tourism destinations.

Sheki DMOs operate as a direct link between the national-level tourism organizations and the public sector, private sector, and community at the regional and local levels.

The activities of the DMO are arranged according to three key pillars:

- *Tourism marketing & communications.* Carry out tourism-oriented marketing activities including digital and print promotions, advertising and PR and participation in festivals and events.
- *Tourism business & product development.* Work with public sector partners to facilitate and support private sector and community investment in the development of tourism resources into quality products and services.
- *Tourism human resource development & standards.* Generate awareness about tourism, support strengthening of community, business and public sector capacities in tourism, and encourage continuous improvement in quality standards in the tourism industry.



CHAPTER 2. CDS Process Description

2.1. Explanation of the CDS methodology

2.1.1. HOW was CDS prepared?

The city of Sheki enjoys the reputation of a crafts capital of Azerbaijan and is a popular destination for both local and international tourists. Nevertheless, craftsmanship traditions in Sheki are seriously challenged by globalization and modernization pressures, insufficient demand, legislative obstacles, and other issues, putting the centuries-old craftsmanship traditions of Sheki at the risk of becoming obsolete.

This CDS aimed to address and analyze the needs and obstacles hindering the development of craftsmanship in Sheki and offer targeted and sustainable solution methods to these issues by exposing the unique intangible heritage of Sheki to international cooperation, innovation, and sustainable development.

The preparation process contained activities that covered different areas of CDS.

Organizational and coordination issues:

- The process started with the Project Team Formation. The roles and responsibilities of each team member were identified and clearly described. Considering the tough deadlines, it was crucial to outline the project timeline and put together the action plan for the period given.
- Advanced mapping of the stakeholders and decision-makers for CDS was prepared and this led to the formation of a Coordination Group that later closely participated in various discussions and consultations.
- Checking Key Stakeholders' ongoing activities and plans to better understand whether and how there are synergies with CDS

Research: Defining the key issues and potential areas of development:

- Desk research was done to assess the status of existing policy papers, laws, and regulations. In addition, a needs assessment was conducted through interviews and individual meetings with stakeholders, decision-makers, and beneficiaries to identify the focus areas of the planned policies.
- Desk research was done on existing literature to generate an understanding of the existing works in this sphere.
- British Council's Crafting Futures program's final report was elaborated to understand the current situation and areas of development in crafts education.
- Desk research on international experience has allowed to get ideas about similar issues in other parts of the world and learn about the success and failure stories in similar situations. Internationalization options were thoroughly researched and analyzed.

Cultural mapping of the city:

- ✓ Collecting additional information for the existing database of artisans; to understand the needs and gaps in entrepreneurial and soft skills among craftspeople of Sheki took place as the main mapping activity
- ✓ Mapping of the currently existing infrastructure was done
- ✓ The ongoing and regular cultural activities and events were identified

First draft and communication A draft action plan addressing the needs was developed and was communicated to all stakeholders and one-on-one meetings were carried out to discuss the plan and the roles of the stakeholders in the implementation of the plans.

Finalization Upon receiving the approval of all stakeholders on the action, the final CDS document was developed by the Applicant.

2.1.2. WHO was involved in CDS preparation?

The CDS has been developed by the key applicant – The Reserves Management Center of the State Tourism Agency in cooperation with “Yukhari-Bash” National Historical-Architectural Reserve in Sheki. Other stakeholders who have participated in the development of CDS and have taken an obligation of its implementation upon the success of the document are:

- a) State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan
- b) Azerbaijan Tourism Board under the State Tourism Agency
- c) Sheki Executive Authority
- d) Sheki Municipality
- e) Sheki Regional Department of the Ministry of Culture
- f) Sheki Destination Management Organization
- g) “Support for Intangible Cultural Heritage” Public Association
- h) ABAD Ceramics and Applied Art Center in Sheki
- i) Small and Medium Business Development Agency (KOBIA)
- j) Individual artists (artisans, craftspeople) and other individual representatives of and actors in the CCI in Sheki
- k) PPP organizations such as Upper Karavansarai hotel, Art Café, and others operating in the sphere of CCI

2.1.3. Timeframe of CDS Preparation

The CDS has been developed in three stages in 2022.

- a) Organizational preparation and Research – February-March
- b) Draft and first communication to key stakeholders – March - April
- c) Finalization of CDS with stakeholder inputs and submission – May

2.1.4. How relates to international/national/regional policies and documents

The CDS is fully compliant with international, national, and local policy frameworks. As discussed in Chapter 1, the CDS in Sheki will be implemented within the normative and non-normative legal acts, state programs, and local regulatory policy documents for the protected zone of the city (cultural and historical heritage part). The management plan developed by the RMC is the main policy document regulating the historical part of Sheki, the so-called “Yukhari Bash” National Historical and Architectural Reserve area, which is fully compliant with the CDS’ philosophy and vision. In addition to this, other UNESCO-approved policy documents – Conservation Master Plan and Urban Regeneration Plan envisage CCI development in the historical part of Sheki by encouraging the purposeful use of historical monuments in the heritage site. These documents are implemented by the RMC which is the responsible state organization for CCI development and implementation of CDS in the cultural heritage site in Sheki within its power defined by law. Moreover, well-established coordination and communication lines of the RMC with the other stakeholders, and state and non-state organizations in Sheki ensure its successful implementation.

2.2. Explanation of CDS philosophy

2.2.1. EU4Culture short overview

The EU4Culture project aims to foster culture as an engine for growth and social development across the six countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region. It will help enhance the role of the cultural sector as a driver of economic development, and, through its interregional approach, will also promote intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange across the EaP partner countries. Moreover, EU4Culture will contribute to improving local governance in the culture sector by supporting regulatory processes and participatory policy dialogue.

The project places culture, the creative industries, and cultural monument sites at its core, which all carry a huge potential for sustainable policies with a broad impact. The project will assist cities in the EaP region to develop and implement a Cultural Development Strategy, following the European Capitals of Culture approach.

The EU-funded project “EU4Culture” is implemented by the following cultural institutions of the EU Member States:

| |
|--------------------------------|
| ◆ Goethe-Institut e.V. (Lead) |
| ◆ Czech Centers |
| ◆ Danish Cultural Institute |
| ◆ Institut Français en Géorgie |

The global objective of this call for proposals is to increase the role of culture and creative industries in economic and social development in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The specific objective of this call for proposals is the elaboration and implementation of Cultural Development Strategies based on a participatory approach and public-private dialogue while preserving and developing multicultural/multi-ethnic dimensions in the targeted cities/areas.

2.2.2. Pillars principles

- a) **Content pillar** – The goal of the content pillar is to **cover all key topics** of CDS. The CDS should be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable, covering the vertical cultural value chain, linking heritage to culture, cultural tourism, and regional development.
- b) **Network pillar** – The goal of the network pillar is to **create long term partnerships** through a stakeholder platform with a focus on:
 - Importance of Intersectoral dialogue
 - Sharing knowledge between cities
 - Involvement of the private sector, professional bodies, and policymakers as a key to implementation
 - Regional platforms
 - Place-based partnership
- c) **Capacity building pillar** – NCC/Ts will, as part of their CDS, set up a mechanism to **facilitate access of local stakeholders to the EU4Culture capacity-building activities**.
 Themes for capacity building under the EU4Culture project:
 - Cultural enterprise and management
 - Cultural indicators
 - Internationalization

Target groups:

- Local policymakers
- Individual artists
- CCI enterprises
- Cultural managers/agents
- Networks/associations representing A&CP or the CCI
- d) **Policy pillar** – The CDS will have to include a **review of local policies and regulations affecting the CCS**:
 - Benchmarking of current policies/regulations
 - Identification of needs/obstacles with local stakeholders
 - Improvement of a coordination framework for CCS
 - Use of a methodology to collect and analyze economic indicators linked to the local cultural and creative sector.
- e) **Communication and dissemination pillar** – The dissemination and communication plan contain an overview of the strategy's stakeholders, all the procedures and data needed to work with all the strategy's stakeholders, and information on the strategy's progress towards the identified target groups.
 This pillar ensures that future CSDs will be based on:
 - Experience sharing
 - Know-how sharing
 - National and regional campaign
 - Local info campaign
 - Social Media strategy

2.2.3. Defining culture

According to the Oxford Bibliographies, “the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) refer to those parts of the modern economy where culture is produced and distributed through industrial means, applying the creativity of individuals and groups to the generation of original cultural product, which may have commercial value either through direct sale to consumers or as intellectual property. The cultural and creative industries typically bring together the arts, media, and design sectors, with a focus upon convergent digital technologies and the challenges and opportunities of globalization.”¹

According to the European Commission Creative Europe Program, “Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) are comprised of all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values, or other artistic individual or collective creative expressions and are defined in the legal basis of the Creative Europe Program.”²

In this document, CCI refers to the traditional crafts industry in Sheki.

¹ <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0188.xml>

² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sectors/cultural-and-creative-sectors>

Chapter 3. SWOT Analysis

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of numerous cultural assets, including museums, ABAD ceramics center, the House of Artisans, shops, and public spaces • Active and developed tourism and service infrastructure • A large number of important, historical monuments, distinctive heritage, vivid architectural scenes, rich and living intangible cultural heritage • Sheki Khan's Palace and Shekikhanov's House • Live sericulture traditions and industry: Sheki a city on the Silk Road • Rich gastronomy and traditional confectionary culture • Rich natural heritage assets/values, including the surrounding forest of the city and natural landscape • Historical Urban Landscape • Having a strong management plan for the heritage and tourism in the city: Sheki DMO, "Yukari Bash" Reserve is operating in a collaborative manner • Available good road infrastructure connecting the city with the capital and the Georgian border • Sheki is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site List, UNESCO Creative Cities network, European Route of Ceramics • Availability of compact location of all cultural assets easing accessibility and communication • Number of proactive local talent in the creative sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited management, entrepreneurial, and investment capacity of creative people • Low private cultural investment in the cultural sector • Lack of strategic vision and program for the cultural development of the city • Lack of sufficient number of talented people and skilled labor for developing new cultural tourism products • Unused monuments and several heritage sites are not fully explored • Weak intersectoral partnership and coordination between the CCI actors • Low interest in CCI among young people • Insufficient and disorganized marketing of products in the craft industry • Insufficient representation of women in the creative industry • Lack of proper railway infrastructure • Seasonality of the tourism industry • Negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on tourism • Limited funding opportunities and low accessibility • Lack of nightlife and entertainment industry • Lack of awareness of local people and stakeholders on CCI and its potential development in Sheki • Lack of purposeful promotion of cultural events |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of strong traditional craftsmanship skills which can encourage innovation for producing modern goods • Increasing cultural tourism offers Sheki to reputation as the “Crafts capital” • Available condition for building long-term career in the cultural sector with proper training • Artisans living in Sheki as a community • Presence of Sheki State Vocational Education Center and ABAD for capacity building in various areas of local crafts • Provision of free working space and tax exemption for craftspeople • Available resources to develop regular crafts and art festivals to make the city an internationally recognized craftsmanship hub • Access to international expertise and education opportunities for local talents through partnerships of the RMC with key organizations to send them to participate in the festivals and events • PPP model of using cultural assets • Traditional and newly renovated historical buildings to be re-imagined and used for contemporary cultural development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disasters and threats related (flood, pandemics) • Globalization pressure • Low demand for locally produced crafts • Competition with cheap mass-made souvenir production • Insufficient transmission of skills to younger generations • Certain traditional crafts at risk of dying out |

Table 1 SWOT analysis of the current situation in Sheki

CHAPTER 4. Vision, Mission, Goals and Actions

Vision

- ✓ Culture and creativity drive the economic growth of the city and enhance the life of the residents of Sheki
- ✓ The creative industry is thriving and reaching new audiences, empowering current and next generation of artisans and creative industry managers
- ✓ Local and foreign tourists visit Sheki for unique cultural experiences
- ✓ Craftsmanship traditions enjoy great visibility and attention, nurturing pride and perpetuating the heritage
- ✓ The city is recognizable internationally with its unique traditions and creativity

Mission

- ✓ Increase the engagement of residents and visitors of Sheki with arts and culture
- ✓ Develop unique cultural experiences and tourism products
- ✓ Create opportunities for artisans to introduce their work in a new light while looking for talents on a constant basis
- ✓ Offer targeted professional training for the creative industry participants
- ✓ Drive economic growth, job creation, talent retention, and perpetuation of craftsmanship traditions through sustainable development of the industry

AREA 1. Cultural Governance, Policymaking, and Participation

Strategic goal 1. Effective governance in CCI is achieved through coordination, a participatory approach, and raised awareness.

Challenges in the sector: The cultural sector in Sheki is mainly managed by state cultural institutions. The top to down approach has been characteristic in the cultural sector of Azerbaijan and surely has advantages for the sector's development such as forming a strong presence of authority, supporting certain products and services, as well as prioritizing quick-win goals. Nevertheless, the sector needs more bottom-up initiatives to respond to the challenges quickly, boost participatory culture and build a sustainable environment for the development of CCI in Sheki as well as in the wider region.

In addition to the policy-level challenges, it should be noted that the CCI stakeholders are disconnected from each other which hinders the collaboration between them. The venues and public spaces are not always open to the creative community and private operators. The sector essentially misses the unified coordination mechanism to bring together all interested parties and create synergy among them for boosting intersectoral cooperation and strategic development.

CCI sector is gaining popularity in recent years with some additional funding and development opportunities. In Azerbaijan, the sector is often nourished by the state budget through state cultural institutions though as known state's financial capacity is limited. However, due to their organizational-legal specifics, the state-funded cultural institutions (except public legal entities) cannot access the external funding sources, such as grants and endowments, nor can engage in commercial activities and generate income, such as selling souvenirs in the visiting centers.

Another main challenge in the cultural development area in the regions of Azerbaijan is that there are fixed human resources of the cultural state institutions identified by the government. Salaries are generally low in this sector. Therefore, it is important to create a favorable policy level condition that can activate the self-funded mechanism for the cultural institutions, thus they can generate income, hire skillful and competent professionals, and implement cultural projects of high quality.

Finally, CCI is a new and rapidly growing industry in Europe and other developed countries. However, in Azerbaijan, the cultural industry is not fully perceived by the society as a single supply and management sector and the general awareness regarding CCI is rather low among the key policymakers in Sheki.

The key policymakers are unaware of the importance of CCI for the development of the local economy and the social well-being of the city. It is therefore important to raise awareness among the key policymakers about the CCI in the regions of the country, including in Sheki.

Opportunities in the sector: Several efforts have been taken to promote CCI at the policy level as a new driving force for development and innovation. In 2019, the Ministry of Culture brought up the importance of the creative industry development by presenting the Creative Azerbaijan portal (www.creative.az). The Azerbaijan Federation of Creative Industries was established in late 2021 as a result of this process, which has ambitious plans in promoting CCI across the country.

The government prepares the “2022-2026 social-economic development strategy” in which the CCI is one of the main projects. If accepted, the new investment opportunities will be available for CCI development at a strategic level.

Also, there are two main state donor organizations – the Agency for State Support to NGOs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, both of which offer periodic grant competitions to the local NGOs about social-cultural-economic and youth-related projects and supports the grassroots initiatives.

Operative goal 1.1 Effective coordination among CCI actors is established to create opportunities for stakeholders to present their projects, plans, and proposals for achieving a coordinated action, intersectoral collaboration, and strategic planning.

Action 1.1.1 CCI Coordination Council is established to monitor and regulate the implementation of the CDS

The Coordination Council will include representatives from cultural state institutions, local executive authorities, private operators, civil society organizations, creative community members, artisans, and young entrepreneurs. It will create a unified coordination mechanism, periodically brings up the CDS-related issues on the table for discussion and aim to achieve coordinated actions. The Coordination Council will be a strategic instrument for mobilizing the interested parties to respond to the challenges during the implementation of CDS and develop concrete recommendations for the leading applicant. It will monitor the implementation of the CDS and publicize the results of the meetings to a wider audience. The Coordination Council meeting will be a public hearing platform since it will involve all stakeholders in the discussion, including grassroots representatives and creative activists. As a leading applicant, RMC will preside over the meetings of the Coordination Council, will set the agenda of each meeting, present the implementation of CDS to the Council, and collect the feedback for the next steps to be taken.

Operative goal 1.2 Key stakeholders, cultural industry actors, and the corporate sector have fully acknowledged the importance of the CCI and its role in the economic development of Sheki city and the wider region and are fully aware of the possible funding and investment opportunities.

The CCI awareness program will be in two directions – a comprehensive program focused on the large auditory and kick-off meetings focused on the limited auditory. Both programs will be prepared and conducted by the RMC team with the support of the co-applicant “Yukhari Bash” Reserve in Sheki. The first and large awareness program will be in the form of seminars, networking events, and individual sessions with the policymakers regarding the CDS. The second one focuses on the narrower groups, such as artisans, grassroots representatives, and private investors separately. The target audience will be key policymakers and representatives of state cultural institutions (Local Executive Authority, Sheki City Municipality, Local Department of Ministry of Culture in Sheki, Sheki ABAD, etc.), cultural professionals, private investors, civil society organizations, including bloggers, influencers, journalists, etc.

Providing additional funding opportunities for the sector's development is also very important. Therefore, RMC plans to organize funding awareness events by involving all interested parties from the sector to present possible funding opportunities from various sources. The target audience will be cultural professionals, individual artists, civil society organizations, City Municipality, etc. for whom they can receive and spend grants according to the legislation.

Another direction of the awareness campaign is going to be with the big private companies. There are departments of big private companies that deal with the investment in social-related projects, which is called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). They are interested in cooperation with the creative sector for their good, though the tendency is not popular in the regions of Azerbaijan due to lack of information. The RMC will establish a team of professionals who will knock on the doors of the big companies operating in Sheki and the wider region and share the information regarding CCI and Sheki's CDS.

Action 1.2.1 To prepare and conduct a CCI Awareness kick-off event with the participation of all involved parties and actors.

Action 1.2.2 Presentations about the importance and the role of CCI and the latest trends are organized for the targeted and specific audiences, such as a) Public authorities, policymakers, and government representatives b) Cultural actors, cultural organizations, civil society representatives, and SMEs c) Media, influencers, bloggers, and journalists.

Action 1.2.3 To conduct a series of awareness events about funding and development opportunities through various channels for all involved CCI actors

Action 1.2.4 To organize a seminar or meetings for private investors and corporate social responsibility representatives of big corporations about the importance of CCI's role in regional development and investment opportunities.

AREA 2. CCI Platforms and Participatory Approach

Strategic goal 2. A culture of active engagement and participation is established by creating necessary platforms.

To activate civic participation in CCI of the city, promote and network, build partnerships, develop and build professional skills, to turn creative ideas into projects and businesses it is essential for the CCI sector to establish a creative hub in Sheki.

Operative goal 2.1 “Creative Sheki” Cultural and Learning Lab (CLL) is established as a modern cultural, creative, and learning platform and will thrive as a space where the youth and CCI actors spend time with benefit.

“Creative Sheki” CLL will comprise of following functions:

Learning and Training Center

Learning and Training Center is the main training and capacity platform created to address the needs of the youth as well as young professionals, cultural managers, artisans, and other CCI actors. The Club will involve professionals from different fields (Small and Medium Business Development Agency, universities, colleagues, private companies, individual experts, etc.) to develop tailor-made educational content on priority fields for the CCI actors to address the needs of the sector in Sheki. The training will be delivered in the form of live sessions, courses, expert talks, webinars, seminars, interactive and hands-on sessions, and other accessible ways to the audience. *(More detailed descriptions of the actions and activities of the Center are provided in Area 3. Capacity Building).*

CCI Business Incubator

Another important mission of the “Creative Sheki” Lab will be the development of a Business Incubator to serve as an open platform, where young entrepreneurs and youth with creative mindsets can develop their ideas into projects with the support of the Lab. This support can be in funds, development and training opportunities, mentorship, collaborations, connections, etc. The incubator users will also be made aware and encouraged to consider priority issues in the cultural life, tourism, and heritage fields in Sheki. The ultimate goal of the Incubator will be investing in and supporting promising endeavors in the cultural and creative sphere of Sheki.

Work scheme of the incubator: The incubator will be announcing an annual call for small business ideas based on creative industry elements and will be selecting up to 5 ideas for further support and development. The incubator will evaluate and help polish the ideas, provide consultations and mentorship services, and liaise with investors. In addition, the incubator will provide a small amount of financial assistance to cover initial costs during the preparation and establishment process of the business. Also, soft and technical skill needs, office space, and other logistical and organizational support will be provided throughout the process.

“Crafting Sheki” Youth Club

Youth Club is planned to be a network platform for the youth of Sheki. It is a dynamic and creative space for young people to hang out, explore their interests, build relationships, and get exposed to creativity through various initiatives.

The members of the Club will be actively participating and volunteering in various cultural events in the city, will initiate discussions and debates on a different range of topics, and will be supported by mentors to reach their true potential.

Library and coworking area

Space will be allocated for spending spare time, working, and studying in a quiet environment. The visitors of the space will access the internet from their devices, or use some of the laptops available for them, as well as printers, scanners, projectors, and the library. All these will be available for a symbolic payment to avoid misuse of resources.

Venue for the “Creative Sheki” CLL: The space known as the House of Artisans is located in a former prison building from 1895 erected during the Tsar Russian period. The red-brick monumental structure is one of the first sites visitors see when entering the old fortress. The building served as a prison until 1960 when it was made into a warehouse of Sheki Silk Factory, and then a library, an archive office, musical music, and a secondary school. The building went through thorough restoration as part of the Cultural Heritage Project of the World Bank from 2005 to 2007. Currently, the ground floor of the building serves as the House of Artisans with crafts studios and shops, and the first floor is used as office space, including Sheki DMO offices.

The House of Artisans project was intended as a creative space for craftspeople, where they can open their shops rent-free, and collaborate. However, the intention was not completely fulfilled due to a shortage of funding and bureaucratic issues. Today, this is a chaotic space where genuine crafts and artworks are sold next to cheap mass-made souvenirs, depreciating the value of the former. This problem is particularly acute in the face of growing tourism in Sheki, as the city is missing high-quality souvenir production. Cheap Chinese-made souvenirs address this demand today, whereas local artisans and artists, especially those using the premises of the House of Artisans could offer more genuine solutions. To utilize the potential of this building, it is planned to place the “Creative Sheki” CLL here.

The “Creative Sheki” CLL will operate under the control of RMC in Sheki. It is because the organizational structure of the RMC allows the Lab to operate as an entity combining both non-profit activities (by attracting grant funds) and commercial activities (e.g., the creative performances and other activities, craft products, etc.). This mechanism will support the self-financing of the activities as well as the sustainability of the CDS beyond the EU4Culture project.

Action 2.1.1 To prepare regulations and provisions document of the “Creative Sheki” Cultural and Learning Lab and its main function areas (the Cultural Incubator, and “Crafting Sheki” Youth Club, Training Center, Library, and Co-working areas as its parts)

The document will include the guidelines, regulations, and specifications of the Lab, as well as its goals, duties, rights, and area of activities.

Action 2.1.2 To prepare an Action and Implementation Plan for the CCI Business Incubator

The Action and Implementation Plan of Business Incubator will present detailed information about the calls, selection requirements and criteria, funding, etc. In addition, it will explain how and what kind of consultations and follow-up refinery of the projects will be available.

Action 2.1.3 To renovate and set up the office place, training rooms, library, and working areas at the Lab.

The House of Artisan in Sheki which is considered for the Lab is under the management of the RMC. There are empty rooms in the building (second floor) that need some renovation and equipment. Firstly, volunteers will be involved to paint the walls of the rooms which will give a

creative spirit to the space. The rooms will then be equipped with the necessary furniture and equipment (tables, chairs, wardrobe, PC, projector, printing machine etc.) and will be ready for use.

Action 2.1.4 Recruit the staff for the Lab.

Two professionals – a project coordinator and a project assistant will be recruited to work for the Lab as well as for the whole CDS. They will be recruited to the RMC. It should be noted that after the CDS is over in 2024 within the EU4Culture project, the continuity and sustainability of the strategy beyond the project is considered by providing a permanent job for these professionals. Consequently, the professionals will be hired for a number of skillsets, especially fundraising skills and experiences, who will have tasks to build a solid relationship with the donors and strengthen this creative institution as a self-financed institution. Of course, the 2022-2024 CDS project implementation is a starting point for Sheki's creative industry which aims to establish a strong fundament for sustainable CCI development beyond the project in the future, and therefore the Lab can be defined as a cornerstone of the CDS in this regard.

Operative goal 2.2 Ensure that the young generation of Sheki is properly engaged in “Creative Sheki” Lab activities and represented in the CCI sector of the city

The youth and CCI actors of Sheki must be aware of the Lab and the opportunities that this space offers to them.

“Creative Sheki” Lab is a completely new project in Sheki, which needs to be properly developed to address the essential needs of the CCI in Sheki and introduced to its audience. It is therefore of ultimate importance to develop the concept of the project, plan the annual activities of the Lab, and raise awareness about the project among schoolchildren, students, other youth groups, craftspeople and artists, and other actors of CCI.

Action 2.2.1 To prepare and implement the communication strategy of the Lab.

The communication strategy will encompass the provisions regarding the digital marketing and communication tools of the Lab. Social media accounts, a website, printed promotion materials, etc, are part of the Lab's communication strategy.

Action 2.2.2 Promote the project among the key audience, recruit and invite them to attend the activities at the Lab

Using the tools outlined in Action 2.1.5, the team of the Lab will organize awareness-raising events. They will be carried out in the local university, vocational school, and the last classes of the secondary schools in the form of presentations and information sessions.

AREA 3. Capacity Building and Learning

Strategic goal 3: A self-sufficient, dynamic, sustainable, competitive, and innovative cultural environment is built by investing in the capacity and professional development of the youth and CCI actors.

One of the main goals of the CDS is to deliver training to youth and CCI actors as per their main needs. The Training and Learning Center of the “Creative Sheki” Lab will be responsible for developing educational content on different priority topics and delivering in-class trainings and online courses to target groups. These trainings and courses will be available to youth, practicing artisans and cultural managers as well as representatives of civil society and other cultural actors too.

Operative goal 3.1 Regular and accessible development and learning opportunities are provided to youth and CCI actors to increase soft, technical, and professional skillset and local and international competitiveness.

The Training and Learning Center will be providing courses and trainings on the following subjects/topics:

Action 3.1.1 To ensure that online courses for cultural managers prepared by EU Eastern Partnership Program are incorporated into the relevant training programs delivered by the Training and Learning Center.

EU EaP program introduces a series of online courses for cultural managers. The courses are posted on the Culture and Creativity website of the program and cover a variety of popular and demanded topics. The courses are a useful resource for professionals in the cultural and creative industries. During the courses, international experts share their experiences, reveal the fundamental and basic knowledge of their profession and teach how to create high-quality projects. The topics currently available on the website include such areas like:

- Project management in Culture;
- Crossovers and fundraising
- Cultural Journalism
- Digital communication
- Communication course
- Proposal writing course
- The finance and budget course
- Marketing course
- Course on Creating Economic value

In order to incorporate these courses into the training programs of the Center, the materials might need to be translated into the local language and printed.

Action 3.1.2 to prepare and launch English language courses (general and CCI specific)

Lack of English language skills is one of the main factors hindering personal and professional development and lifelong learning of the youth and CCI actors in Sheki. English is one of the most important skills allowing access to information, research, finding opportunities for training and development and applying to the programs, communicating with like-minded people, learning from international experience, sharing knowledge, and many other important actions for the development of CCI actors. Some level of English proficiency is a requirement for most grant and training opportunities, e.g., Mobility grants offered by the European Union. For this reason, English training for CCI is a high-priority training field for all the actors. English courses will include:

- General English language courses
- Guest speakers and intensive CCI-related courses, e.g., research, writing, public speaking, proposal writing, etc.
- Conversation clubs

Action 3.1.3 To prepare and launch Entrepreneurial skills training

The purpose of this course is to help craftspeople and artists develop their entrepreneurial skills to build more successful businesses and make better strategic decisions. The training course will be designed to provide fundamental knowledge to develop business model frameworks and business plans. The course will teach all steps between ideation and building a successful venture, as well as profitability and sustainability models in creative businesses. The marketing part of the course will teach basic skills in market research and segmentation, defining customer profiles, finding the right tools to access these groups, and building brands. The course will be designed to specifically address the needs of creative entrepreneurs and artisans of Sheki.

Action 3.1.4 To prepare and launch the digitalization skills program

It is very vital to improve digital skills and harness the benefits of the technology for creative industry actors in order to achieve the goals, find new ways to reach and engage audiences, develop sustainable business models, and maximize income opportunities. Increasing the digital skills and capability through social media (facebook, Instagram, youtube), email marketing, web design, practical support in e-commerce, etc. will advance the local and international competitiveness of creative actors and entrepreneurs. The enhancement of this skill will also support craftspeople to become more resilient.

The program will ensure the following knowledge is delivered to the relevant audience:

- Basics and fundamentals of digitalization
- Outreach through social media platforms: how to reach a bigger audience using digital platforms
- Digital marketing and digital promotion of the branding
- E-commerce platforms

Action 3.1.5 To announce Annual Digital Culture Award among Sheki local initiatives and promote it to the national NETTY Award conducted annually in Baku

Creative and cultural enterprises throughout the world are increasingly embracing digital tools and means to come up with innovative and creative ways of building audiences and engaging

with their peers and customers. Moreover, digital tools allow access to new audiences and cooperation with like-minded people who are not physically in the same location.

Several actions are already intended within this CDS to increase the digital skills of the CCI actors in Sheki. The annual Digital Culture Award is intended to motivate the craftspeople of Sheki to apply their skills for real purposes and benefit from new opportunities. For this purpose, local CCI actors can apply for the award with their “digital journey” stories, achievements, and insights. These can include achievements through TikTok and Instagram channels, digital museum initiatives, digital fundraising activities, online performances, e-commerce platforms, and others. The best “digital journey” will be selected by voting and promoted to the national NETTY Award.

Established in 2004, NETTY is the first professional award in Azerbaijan in the field of Information and Communication Technologies created to promote the growth of the ICT sector in the country.

Action 3.1.6 To prepare and launch training on environmental sustainability in production and creativity

A completely new dimension in the training of the craftspeople is awareness about the environmental sustainability of their production, as well as monitoring and managing this aspect and using it as a unique selling point. According to the Craft Research by British Council Crafting Futures Program, the majority of the 47 respondents could not respond to the question “about how they practice their craft in an environmentally sustainable way”.¹ Despite the lack of consciousness about this factor, most traditional crafts are environmentally sustainable to a considerable degree, as most raw materials, methods, and instruments used in production are natural and/or manual. Awareness and conscious use of this integral aspect of production could allow the craftspeople to market their work to a completely new and growing audience of consumers. Therefore, it is important to add the subject of environmental sustainability when it comes to production, packaging, and promotion of goods to the training programs.

Action 3.1.7 To prepare and launch training on museum work focusing on best practices, income generation mechanisms, international experiences, the efficient organizational structure of museums, etc.

Training for museum managers and administrators is planned in line with the renovation and repurposing projects of the museums in Sheki (See Operative goal 4.2). The course includes training about modern museum work trends and best practices, the role of museums as active initiators of cultural events, festivals, educational programs, research projects, and other activities, income-generating models and sustainable development of museums, museums working as networks, and as areas showcasing and sales points for best examples of local CCIs products in line with their themes.

Action 3.1.8 To prepare and launch training on Event Management

One of the key goals of this CDS is to support the organization of several cultural events in order to make Sheki a meeting point for creative people from different parts of the world and show the craftsmanship traditions of the city to the world. Therefore, qualified event managers are essential players of the CCI in Sheki and there is a need for their development.

¹ British Council Crafting Futures Programme Azerbaijan Craft Research, by Plymouth College of Art in collaboration with A smart Creative Hub with support from the Tourism Agency. Report by Dr Kim Bagley. 2022

The training includes several courses:

- Different types of events based on theme and size, different stages of events
- Establishment of the objectives of events and decision-making on the event framework, including the place, time, expenses, pricing, logistics, and content
- Recruitment and forming a team with professionals, volunteers, invitees, and other parties, and establishing communication among them; defining the roles of all involved parties
- Fundraising and managing the funds
- Promotion of the event including social media and event marketing
- Risk management including rehearsals and pre-event briefings

Action 3.1.9 To prepare and launch training on Design Thinking training

Design thinking is an important skill for craftspeople. The training will be aligned with the “Design Connections” program of the State Tourism Agency in 2020-2021 (See Chapter 1) and the main goal is to use the program as a central example to teach how innovation and craftsmanship skills can be used to address the needs of the market and create solutions. The training program will be designed for craftspeople working with traditional methods and materials in Sheki and the catalog of the program will be used as a practical guide. The following key themes will be included in the training:

- Identifying the current needs of the market
- Compare the market needs with existing specifications of the production to find overlaps and gaps; translate the needs of the market to production
- Brainstorm and generate new ideas, and learn to transform ideas to design concepts
- Learn about prototyping methods based on the “Design Connection” product samples
- Analyze the commercial viability of the product by calculating costs and estimating revenues
- Analyze the environmental impact of new design concepts and find ways of its reduction
- Build a strategic production plan

AREA 4. CCI and Tourism

Strategic goal 4: The culture and creativity of Sheki are utilized for the region’s sustainable development and social well-being through integration into the tourism development policies.

Through the centuries, Sheki city has been known for its qualified craftsmen who are skilled in pottery, copper work, silk production, painting, embroidery, and many other traditional crafts. The region also serves some of Azerbaijan’s tastiest and unique cuisine, with two of the most beloved being *Sheki halva* (baklava) and *piti*, a stew created with meat and potatoes and prepared in a terracotta pot.

Given the huge resources of tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets and natural values, the sustainable development of the city is closely linked with modern demanded tourism product development based on the community tourism value chain. The product development considers the current market trends in the tourism industry. Infrastructure projects and the provision of amenities are essential for tourism, but their development in Sheki requires at the beginning of the process an extensive investment. Therefore, within the CDS, the RMC plans to have in-depth research of the cultural tourism sector in Sheki relevant to the current market trends and present the findings and recommendations to the responsible state institutions and policymakers.

Operative goal 4.1 New unique, authentic, and competitive touristic products and experiences are created by exploiting Sheki’s cultural heritage resources and cultural events.

Being a main cultural tourism destination in the Western North tourism corridor of Azerbaijan, it offers so many product development opportunities in the cultural sector. The current tourism products are mainly traditional handcraft and gastronomical products whereas there is a huge opportunity for Sheki regarding innovative tourism products relevant to modern needs. From this perspective, Sheki stands in a need of research on innovative tourism products as well as all relevant urban planning for further cultural tourism development strategy.

The proposed tourist activities in Sheki are initially grouped as but are not limited to the followings:

- History and cultural heritage: the tangible and intangible culture and the stories related to the different historical layers of Sheki
- Built environment: the unique Khan Palace and the old and well-preserved parts of Sheki
- People of Sheki: their attachment to the tradition and the permanent creative arts
- Learning to prepare local dishes/specialties
- Making traditional handicrafts of Sheki

Each sub-sector embraces huge opportunities concerning new product development in Sheki and for this reason, there is a need for in-depth research.

Action 4.1.1 to prepare a “Sheki Cultural Tourism Development” strategy document and propose it to State Tourism Agency for further consideration and implementation.

This strategy document will cover an analysis of the current situation on product development needs, and community-based tourism opportunities and provide relevant recommendations to the responsible institutions. The methodology of the research will include first-hand data through surveys, expert interviewers, and focus group discussions of various actors and stakeholders, including state institutions, artisans, tour operators, guides, and other private operators.

Operative goal 4.2 Museums in Sheki function as interesting and attractive tourist products.

Museums are considered a cornerstone of any cultural tourism offer and also deliver considerable benefits to local economies. It is therefore essential that these products are cared for and further developed to continue delivering visitor value for money and a quality experience.

As key players in the cultural and creative sector of Sheki, the work of the museums should be repurposed in line with modern requirements. The management of the RMC and “Yukari-Bash” Historical-Architectural Reserve have started through conservation and restoration projects in the historical part of the city and currently, tens of buildings are at different stages of restoration. Even though structural restoration of the buildings is ongoing, there is not much planning about the reorganization of the work of these museums in line with modern requirements.

Action 4.2.1 To prepare a new management concept for three museums in Sheki

As part of this CDS, it is planned to involve museum experts to develop new concepts for three museums (see item 1.4.3 in Chapter 1) and present them to STA for implementation.

The following key elements are missing in today’s management of Sheki museums and will be considered within the new concepts for each museum:

Curatorial functions - The work of the museum starts with the work of the curatorial functions, as the late Sir Henry Miers mentioned ‘it will be readily understood that of all the factors which can make or mar the success of a museum, the personality of the curator is the most vital. Under a good curator, the museum cannot be wholly a bad one, whatever its defects; under a bad one, a museum cannot be entirely a good one, whatever its advantages.’²

Curators will be responsible for organizing the exhibition areas of their relevant sphere, developing, and implementing the annual calendar of activities, and setting the tone of educational projects and community work. Curators working with artworks will also be responsible for discovering new talents and working with the artists of Sheki. They will be responsible for selecting and showcasing the works of artists to organize the sales of their work.

Collections of the museums – The museum management should engage in safeguarding the collections through appropriate conservation, handling, sorting, storage, and display methods. They should encourage research and public engagement by making available up-to-date essential information about the collections of the museum and ensuring that it develops and uses its collections in line with the legislation, as well as the goals of the museum.

Educational activities - One of the main functions of museums is providing educational service to the public and it is important that the museums of Sheki are well-equipped for this. Much of the educational service may fall on the curators of the museums, who are expected to initiate educational activities in line with the domain of the museum and the current exhibitions. Educational programs can range from artist talks to school trips and artist studio visits.

Marketing and Communication – this is to disseminate information about museums to the media and the public and promote the events organized by the museum. The museum also should

² Sir Henry Miers, F.R.S., D.S.C. “Report on the Public Museums of the British Isles (other than the national museums)”, 1928

respond to media inquiries and organizes press conferences and interviews in line with the ongoing projects.

Action 4.2.2 To conduct professional development training for museum managers, curators and workers (in conjunction with Action 3.1.7)

The following areas and ideas will be the main focus of the trainings:

- Modern standards of conservation, handling, sorting, storage, and display methods of art objects;
- Building partnerships with other museums in Sheki, Baku, and the region to share experience and work as a network;
- Using innovation by embracing technology, smartphones, and interactive exhibitions, to become places where young people, children, and tourists gravitate towards, promoting user-generated content by establishing “Instagrammable” corners, and other methods. Social media, especially the use of Facebook events and Instagram stories about these activities can be a powerful way of promoting the museum and growing its visitor base. Inviting local and country-level celebrities to these events may further increase interest in them.
- Calendars of activities to ensure that visitors come to the museum repeatedly and accommodate different visitor groups. Activities may include artist talks, “Museum Night” events, happy hours, interactive lectures, masterclasses, exhibition openings, book readings, performances, celebrations of national holidays and important holidays in the world, educational programs, festivals, etc.
- New income-generating opportunities such as:
 - Ticket sales for admission to exhibitions and events
 - Proceeds from state endowment funds
 - Museum membership fees for regular visitors
 - Donations
 - Grants offered by the state and international organizations
 - Fundraising activities, e.g., annual entertainments, dinners, balls, and others in line with the policy and the philosophy of the museum

Operative goal 4.3 Craft traditions of Sheki contribute to the enrichment of quality tourism experiences by introducing authentic and accessible handicraft products

The significance of handicrafts for the tourism industry is well known. As mentioned earlier, handicraft production is a way for the communities to preserve their cultural heritage and expose it to visitors. However, keeping the authenticity of the handicraft elements and souvenirs has not always been a priority for some local entrepreneurs. The CDS will provide an action that will foster and facilitate maintaining the authenticity and uniqueness of crafts.

Action 4.3.1 To establish and organize the “Seal of Excellence” annual Crafts Festival to distinguish the quality and authenticity of handicraft products offered to visitors of the city.

To celebrate the craftsmanship traditions of Sheki and create incentives for innovation and development for the craftspeople, it is planned to organize the “Seal of Excellence” – the annual Crafts Festival. With this action, it is expected to increase the innovative predisposition of the craftspeople via competition and incentives and improve the overall well-being of craftspeople by offering monetary awards. Moreover, by successfully participating in the event, the craftspeople will receive special seals of excellence to validate and distinguish genuine craftsmanship from the rest.

As part of this program and apart from the regular entertainment programs, the craftspeople of Sheki will be invited to participate in a competition on the following categories: gastronomy, woodwork, metalwork, pottery, embroidery, silk.

For each category, the participants will be asked to present at least two pieces of their products – a finished and an incomplete work to demonstrate both the artwork and the process. This is in order to give the authors the chance to showcase a long-term personal project and demonstrate their mastery. Both presented artworks must be new and have never been presented before and the participants will be asked to also elaborate on the applied technique and materials in detail to the jury for nomination. The jury consisting of experts from different applied art and cultural fields will decide on the nominations based upon pre-determined rubrics which evaluate the art pieces based on the following criteria:

- authenticity
- innovation
- sustainability
- creativity
- revival of a rare skill

For each category, three types of monetary awards, sponsored gifts, and certificates of excellence will be issued to the craftspeople. The certificates will also be accompanied by stickers with QR codes, which can be put on the shop windows for visitors to scan and find out about the craft and craftsperson, as well as his or her performance at the event, information about the background of the author, practical information such as opening hours of the shop, masterclass opportunities, social media and e-commerce links, and other details.

The three monetary awards and sponsored gifts for each category, as well as the special awards, will be:

- 1st place – 1,000 AZN
- 2nd place – 700 AZN
- 3rd place – 500 AZN
- Special innovation award
- Special “rising star” award for young and beginning craftsmen who have demonstrated great performance

All public and exhibition spaces, including historical buildings, museums, theatres, and open-air display areas in Sheki will be included in the organization of the event. The participants will be encouraged to donate their successful artworks to city authorities, so that they are displayed in public and cultural places in different parts of the city, such as post offices, administrative

offices, as well as premises at the balance of the Reserve all year round. For this purpose, the Executive Authority and the Reserve need to allocate designated places for artworks. Informative signage for the art pieces will show the name of the artwork and artist and contact details.

Apart from the competition, it is intended to invite artisans from other parts of Azerbaijan and abroad as honored guests, who will meet local artisans and the creative youth of Sheki. During the entire time of the events, forums, masterclasses, artist talks, and as well as kids and youth workshops will be organized. Concerts and entertainment programs will be reserved for the evening time.

AREA 5. Internationalization and Cooperation

Strategic goal 5: Sheki city is recognized by and engaged in the international arena through active promotion, participation, and networking activities led by its CCI sector actors.

Sheki city has huge potential to be represented in the international arena using its distinctive identity as a creative city. Unfortunately, this potential has not properly been utilized so far. In line with internationalization efforts, the CDS will scale up the relevant activities such as promotion of the city, participation in various international initiatives, organizing and hosting international experts and events, and enhancing regional cooperation. Internationalization as a necessary step to highlight and enhance the city's capacity will play a significant role in the development of the city's CCI sector.

Operative goal 5.1 Cultural Tourism of Sheki is properly promoted in the international arena

Sheki is popular as a destination that offers a variety of interesting experiences to tourists such as different recreation and winter activities, hiking, and other natural activity products. However, cultural tourism potential is probably the strongest in Sheki compared to any other region of the country. The cultural tourism of Sheki helps preserve its cultural and historical heritage as well as reinforces its identity and builds its image. A significant portion of the cultural tourism activities in Sheki is built on the city's creative industry elements. To facilitate the development of the creative industry and attract a greater audience, international promotion of the city's cultural tourism is essential.

Action 5.1.1 To work with Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) to represent Sheki and its cultural tourism in ATB's regular international fairs and trade shows

ATB is one of the leading stakeholders of the CDS. As mentioned in Chapter 1.5, its main mission is to promote the tourism potential of the country to international markets. ATB participates in a significant number of international tourism events, fairs, trade shows, etc. annually. The CDS will ensure collaboration with ATB to include the cultural tourism promotion of Sheki in their international promotional plans. The regional branch of ATB, the Sheki DMO representative will join the ATB team during these international promotional campaigns with specific content and materials prepared about the cultural tourism potential of Sheki.

Operative goal 5.2 Sheki CCI actors have been exposed to various international development opportunities such as exchanges, competitions, events, etc

Despite the city's great potential for creative actors, artisans, and young people who could benefit from a variety of international development opportunities and represent Sheki through their talent and creativity, so far none of those opportunities were exploited. These opportunities not only contribute to CCI actors' personal and professional development but also play a significant role in reviving the city's creative industry. CDS consider utilizing some of those opportunities through the following actions.

Action 5.2.1 To encourage youth and young CCI actors of Sheki to benefit from the EU's Erasmus+ program and support the application process.

As known, Erasmus+ is an education and training program of the EU for young professionals and students. Within the CDS, there will be regular information sessions to raise awareness of the youth of Sheki and practicing young CCI professionals about the opportunities offered by this program. The audience will be encouraged to participate in the program and support will be provided in the application process for those interested.

Action 5.2.2 To cooperate with the Azerbaijan National Partner of the global Creative Business Cup competition to engage and involve young creative entrepreneurs from Sheki

Creative Business Cup (CBC) is an annual global competition, enrolling participants from more than 80 countries all over the world. The competition is for creative and innovative startups and aims to empower the cultural and creative industries worldwide. There are National Partner of CBC functioning in each country and they organize national competitions for creative business ideas. Each year, CBC global finals get together at the final forum. This is a popular and innovative platform that provides development and networking opportunities globally. CDS considers involving Sheki's young and prospective entrepreneurs in this platform through organizing informational workshops in collaboration with CBC National Partner in Azerbaijan and assisting with customized trainings for selected individuals.

Action 5.2.3 To facilitate the participation of local artisans in the international crafts festivals such as the Homo Faber Event by the Michelangelo Foundation and Life Beyond Tourism festival on cultural expressions.

CDS plans to build cooperation with international organizations and platforms that bring together artisans and craftsmen from different parts of the world in one place to share and exchange their culture, traditions, techniques, and creativity. Michelangelo Foundation based in Italy is one of those organizations. Homo Faber event is a public exhibition of the finest European

craftsmanship, staged every two years. Presenting the work of hundreds of master artisans and designers, Homo Faber would be a good opportunity for Sheki artisans to present themselves and learn from others. Another such opportunity is offered by the Life Beyond Tourism movement. They organize annual festivals expressing cultural diversity and promoting the culture of different nations and regions. It is planned to select one or two artisans each year to attend such events and bring back international experience to share with others.

Action 5.2.4 To join an international “Create Day” digital event by introducing video promotion materials of local artisans.

“Create Day” is another initiative of the Michelangelo Foundation. It is a digital one-day event that showcases video materials of crafts masters from all parts of the world. The video materials play non-stop for 24 hours. The CDS plans to prepare short promotional video materials of selected artists and artisans of Sheki and collaborate with the “Create Day” initiative to showcase those materials to a worldwide audience.

Action 5.2.5 To work with the ICOM National Committee for engaging the museum workers of Sheki in international development opportunities offered by ICOM.

The International Council of Museums is an international organization of museums and a forum of museum experts and professionals. It establishes professional standards for museum activities, makes recommendations, and promotes capacity building. There is a National Committee of ICOM functioning in Azerbaijan. The CDS considers collaborating with the National Committee to internationalize the museum specialists and workers of Sheki. It is planned to nominate at least 6 museum specialists from Sheki to become ICOM members and then further encourage their participation in ICOM’s local and global capacity-building and professional development opportunities.

Operative goal 5.3 Sheki CCI actors benefit from hosting various international cultural events and residencies.

The internationalization of the city’s creative industry will be streamlined by various efforts. CDS will bring the international expertise to Sheki and expose it to a local audience. Hosting different events in Sheki will also benefit the city’s CCI sector by creating opportunities for a larger local audience. The following actions are planned to reach this goal.

Action 5.3.1 To work with ABAD Ceramic Center and plan a Residency project in cooperation with the European Ceramic Route.

Sheki with its unique ceramic traditions has become a member of the European Ceramic Route of the Council of Europe in 2020. It is a network of European ceramic towns and institutions that share knowledge about the production of ceramics and its old traditions. The network also aims to create a sustainable and competitive tourism offer based on artistic productions, workshops, and museums. Within this CDS and in cooperation with Sheki ABAD Ceramic Center, it is planned to organize a residency project in Sheki and invite two ceramic artists from the European network member institutions of the Ceramic Route. During the one-week residency project, masterclasses and workshops will be organized for the local audience.

Action 5.3.2 To work with the Executive Authorities of Sheki to prepare an Action Plan for “Sheki as a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network” and ensure the engagement of the CCI sector in the Action plan.

Sheki is a member of the **UNESCO Creative Cities Network** since 2017 under the category of Crafts and Folk Art. This membership has created an additional chance for the city to connect with other similar cities in the world, as well as support the production and innovation of traditional crafts and cultural tourism. The activities to underline and enhance this international membership are overseen by the Executive power of the city and they regularly organized and hosted various events. Due to the pandemic situation in the world, the activities have been suspended and plans for the future need a new approach now. The CDS plans to collaborate with the Executive Power of the city and work on the “UNESCO Creative Cities Network: Action plan for Sheki 2023-2025” document that will ensure the greater involvement of the CCI sector.

Action 5.3.3 To work with the Georgian Heritage Crafts Association to organize joint annual craft events and enhance EaP regional partnership.

Azerbaijan has established strong economic and political relations with its neighbor country, Georgia. Establishing connections between Sheki and Georgian cities with crafts traditions will bring additional value to these relations and also contribute to the enhancement of the EaP regional partnership.

Georgian Heritage Crafts Association is a membership organization, which acts to safeguard Georgian heritage crafts traditions and works toward a sustainable framework for the sector’s development. Within this CDS it is planned to establish collaboration with this organization and organize a regional conference hosted by Sheki on the topic of: “Crafting in the Caucasus: Craft industry and the region’s economic development”. Participants of the conference from both sides will be craft industry actors, artisans, civil society representatives, government representatives, etc.

It will be suggested to organize such regional conferences on an annual basis and gradually expand the geographical coverage of participation.

CHAPTER 5. Implementation and Monitoring Plan

5.1 Project Implementation

Project implementation implies forming a project team and implementing the activities based on the Activity Plan. As for the project team, a number of professionals will be recruited for the implementation of the CDS, including the project director, project coordinator, project assistant, and marketing and communication specialist. All positions will be supported by Terms of Reference in which all the responsibilities and duties will be clarified for implementing and managing the project. During the implementation, the RMC will procure several expert services which will be supported by the contractual agreement. Each contract will be kept in the project filing system which will be available for audit oversight.

Implementation of activities also includes regular reporting of the expenditure of the budget. Monthly reporting of the budget will be provided in the accounts of the project to facilitate the development Project Budget Manual in which precise control of project finance and budget expenditure is covered.

5.2 Project Monitoring

The plan of implementation and monitoring of activities is one of the main requirements for the implementation process of the CDS. The control process includes periodic evaluation of the works carried out, development of the relevant report, and final update of the further Cultural Development Strategy and relevant reports based on the acquired information.

In order to undertake the systematic monitoring activities, RMC proposes to take into account the 5 following headings:

1. Cultural Governance, Policymaking, and Participation
2. CCI Platforms and Participatory Approach
3. Capacity Building and Learning
4. CCI and Tourism
5. Internationalization and Cooperation

Thus, the CDS of Sheki presents an action plan under these headings.

The CDS implies the activities to establish coordination and control mechanism under RMC management – Coordination Group, which will organize regular meetings and develop semi-annual and annual reports. It is also important that these reports are disseminated to all responsible agencies and the public. At the same time, it is essential that the representative of

Reserve, Local Executive Authority, Local Department of Ministry of Culture, and City Municipality join the Group.

The control process is a systematic and standard process of gathering information during project implementation in order to determine whether interventions are moving toward specific goals or project objectives. The control process allows us to understand new challenges and shifting requirements. At the same time, the control allows checking whether the CDS is being implemented as planned: if the goals have been achieved, and/or if the activities are being carried out as scheduled.

The control over the implantation of the CDS is an ongoing process and has the following aspects: process control, financial control, and impact control (**Table 1**).

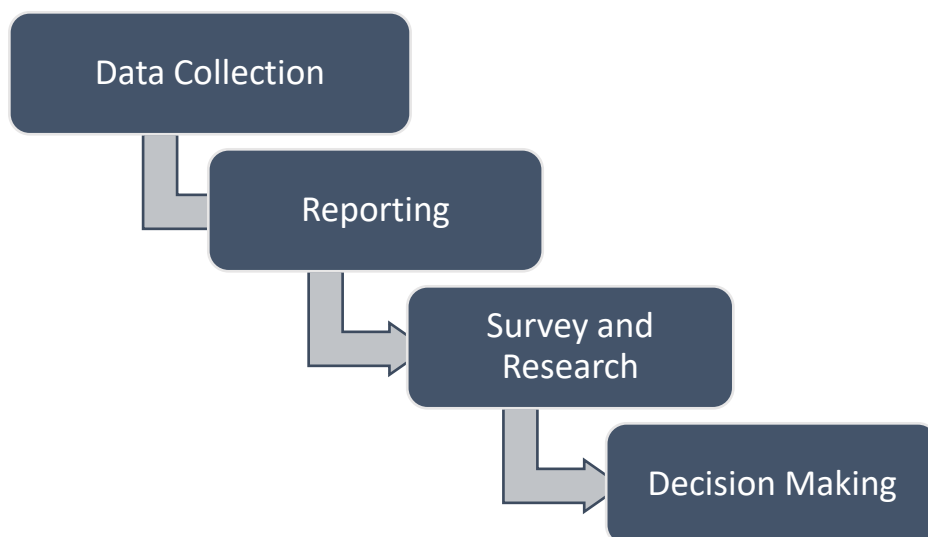
| Ongoing control over the Implementation of the CDS | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Process Control | Technical Control | Financial Control |

Process control is collecting and analysing the data in order to determine whether project goals and activities are progressing toward the intended project outcomes. It measures costs, actions, and outcomes. Process control answers the following questions: What has been done so far? When was it done? How was it done? Most data collected during project implementation serves as process control.

Financial control includes control over project/program costs and their comparison with the budget developed at the planning stage. Control over the use of funds at the disposal of the project/program is necessary to ensure that no financial waste or loss occurs. Financial control is also important for transparency and accountability, as well as measuring financial efficiency (maximizing efficiency at minimum costs).

Impact control determines the impact of project activities on the population. Impact on the population is one of the long-term effects of the project. The CDS specifically indicates measuring the changing impact in order to show an improvement in the condition of beneficiaries. The control over both negative and positive impacts and intended and unintended consequences of the project/program is necessary.

All issues and problems included in the CDS will go through a step-by-step process of data collection, reporting, research and education, and decision-making.



Detailed ongoing control means day-to-day control of the CDS. This control will be implemented by the reserve personnel and the representatives of the Coordination Group. The last two phases of the control process will be implemented by the State Tourism Agency and the Reserve Management Center. The ongoing control of the CDS of Sheki city will be a long-term process and involve numerous experts. This means that a special budget is required for the control process. The budget will help to achieve successful outcomes and planned goals.

The control will be implemented in the following stages.

| Control phases | Control actions | Control implementation |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Ongoing control of the CDS | Weekly, quarterly and annual reports | Preparing reports and sending them to relevant agencies and other stakeholders |
| | Opinion research | More detailed analysis of the issues in the monthly, quarterly, and annual reports |
| | Intensive opinion research | Some assistance may be needed for the project control |
| Medium-term control of the CDS | Medium-term review | Synthesis of prior work and research, although additional data may be required |
| | Intensive opinion research | Some assistance may be needed for the project control |
| Project completion and audit | Final report | Final report on the completion of project provided to stakeholders |
| | Intensive opinion research | Some information is required for the final report. |
| Note: One or both reports will contribute to the evaluation and design of the Second CDS in 2025 | | |

Monitoring Plan

The Monitoring Plan depends entirely on the Activity Plan and is relevant to the Logical Framework Matrix of the CDS. All the impact, outcomes, outputs, and indicators are defined in these documents.

A new Cultural Development Strategy for Sheki city will be developed in 3 years based on the results of the Monitoring Plan. The unfilled columns will be provided with relevant information as the monitoring process starts according to the deliverables stated in the Activity Plan.

CHAPTER 6. Summary of Pillars

The pillars are cross-cutting principles that we consider throughout the Cultural development strategy process.

6.1 Content pillar

The goal of the content pillar is to cover all key topics of CDS. The CDS should be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable, covering the vertical cultural value chain, linking heritage to culture, cultural tourism, and regional development.

The requirements of the content pillar are addressed within this CDS through several key actions. As a city with a vivid architectural legacy and living crafts heritage, Sheki is already a popular cultural tourism destination. We believe that the implementation of this CDS will significantly enrich the cultural tourism offer of Sheki and bring innovation and creativity to existing cultural experiences, thus contributing to regional development, increased employment rates, and economic and social sustainability.

A holistic approach to tourism product development has been adopted within this CDS. It is planned to develop a “Sheki Cultural Tourism Development” strategy responding to current product development needs and community-based tourism opportunities and to present it to State Tourism Agency for implementation.

As the cornerstone of a city’s cultural tourism offer, museums deliver considerable benefits to local economies. Three museums in Sheki have been selected to undergo substantial reestablishment in terms of management structures, income-generating models, and professional development training of the personnel. As a result, they are expected to create new unique cultural tourism activities, while also serving the local community as alternative educational and recreation spaces.

Another important cultural tourism and heritage-related action is the establishment of the “Seal of Excellence” Annual Crafts Festival. Successful participants of the event will receive monetary awards and seals of excellence, distinguishing the authenticity of their craft. The event is also expected to attract many domestic and international visitors to Sheki.

As part of this CDS, Sheki DMO will present the new cultural tourism opportunities at the international tourism fairs that Azerbaijan Tourism Board takes part in. It is expected that Sheki will see an increased tourism demand as a result of the new opportunities and international promotion, which will significantly contribute to regional development.

6.2 Network pillar

The goal of the network pillar is to create a long-term partnership through a stakeholder platform with a focus on:

- ***Importance of Intersectoral dialogue***
- ***Sharing knowledge between cities***
- ***Involvement of the private sector, professional bodies, and policymakers as a key to implementation***
- ***Regional platforms***
- ***Place-based partnership***

One of the key findings of the needs analysis conducted for this project was the lack of coordination and cooperation between stakeholders. The sector essentially misses unified coordination mechanisms to bring together all interested parties and create synergy for boosting intersectoral cooperation and strategic development. The CDS has several planned actions to address this issue. One of them is the establishment of the CCI Coordination Council, consisting of representatives from cultural state institutions, local executive authorities, private operators, civil society organizations, creative community members, artisans, and young entrepreneurs, to monitor and regulate the implementation of the CDS. The Coordination Council will include

Another partnership plan within this CDS is related to the establishment of the “Creative Sheki” Lab, which will be responsible for the development of educational content and delivery of tailor-made training to the CCI actors. “Creative Sheki” Lab will serve as an example of a place-based partnership, in which educators, practitioners, and mentors meet local CCI actors and where cooperation between representatives of different CCI fields join forces for. “Creative Sheki” Lab will not be limited to Sheki, but rather be open to all interested professionals from different parts of Azerbaijan.

To foster cooperation on a regional level, the CCI intends several actions. Regional conference on the topic of: “Crafting in the Caucasus: Craft industry and the region’s economic development” with the Georgian Heritage Crafts Association will be organized and hosted in Sheki to strengthen existing connections between the CCIs of the two countries and contribute to the enhancement of the EaP regional partnership.

Moreover, creative professionals of Sheki will be informed about and encouraged to participate in various regional programs, contests, and festivals for personal and professional development, such as EU Erasmus+ programs, Creative Business Cup competition, and ICOM professional development programs for museum workers, and others.

6.3 Capacity building pillar

NCC/Ts will, as part of their CDS, set up a mechanism to facilitate access of local stakeholders to the EU4Culture capacity-building activities. Themes for capacity building under the EU4Culture project:

- ***Cultural enterprise and management***
- ***Cultural indicators***
- ***Internationalization***

Target groups:

- ***Local policymakers***

- **Individual artists**
- **CCI enterprises**
- **Cultural managers/agents**
- **Networks/associations representing A&CP or the CCI**

One of the central missions of this CDS is to address the need for a qualified workforce for the sustainable development of the CCI in Sheki. Several actions are planned to attend to the professional development needs of different CCI actors, which will predominantly be implemented through various programs organized by the “Creative Sheki” Lab. The Lab will consist of four main parts:

- **Learning and Training Center** – responsible for developing educational content on different priority topics and delivering in-class and online training to target groups. The trainings and courses will be available to youth, practicing artisans and cultural managers, local policymakers, representatives of civil society, and other cultural actors. The training is planned to cover the following topics:
 - English language courses
 - Entrepreneurial skills training
 - Digitalization skills program
 - Training on environmental sustainability in production and creativity
 - Training on museum work
 - Training in Event Management
 - Design Thinking training

Besides these trainings, it is also planned to localize the existing training materials on the EaP Culture and Creativity platform for the local CCI and make them available at the Lab.

- **CCI Business Incubator** – an open platform, where young entrepreneurs will get support to develop their ideas into business endeavors.
- **“Crafting Sheki” Youth Club** – a network platform for the youth of Sheki to socialize, explore their interests, build relationships, and get exposed to creativity through various initiatives.
- **Library and coworking area** – a space allocated for spending spare time, working, and studying in a quiet environment.

Another dimension to the capacity building of the CCI within the CDS is various international events to be hosted in Sheki, such as ceramic art residency programs with ABAD Ceramics Center, “Crafting in the Caucasus: Craft industry and the region’s economic development” joint annual craft events, various events and programs of Michelangelo Foundation, and others.

6.4 Policy pillar

The CDS will have to include a review of local policies and regulations affecting the CCS:

- **Benchmarking of current policies/regulations**
- **Identification of needs/obstacles with local stakeholders**
- **Improvement of a regulatory framework for CCS**

- ***Use of a methodology to collect and analyze economic indicators linked to the local cultural and creative sector.***

While the importance of CCI and its role in economic development is increasingly becoming evident among policymakers, recent years have witnessed several key efforts the promotion of CCI as a new driving force for development and innovation at the government level. One of such efforts is the Creative Azerbaijan portal (www.creative.az) initiated by the Ministry of Culture in 2019. Following this process, the Azerbaijan Federation of Creative Industries was established in 2021 and has set ambitious plans for promoting CCI across the country. Another important step is the “2022-2026 social-economic development strategy”, in which CCI is a key component. If adopted, this strategy will open new investment opportunities for CCI development.

Besides that, two main state donor organizations –Agency for State Support to NGOs, and the Youth Foundation offer regular grant competitions to local NGOs on social, cultural, economic, and youth projects and support grassroots initiatives.

Despite recent growing interest in the role and opportunities of CCI, there are several key issues and needs hindering the growth of this sector, identified below:

- Lack of sufficient bottom-up initiatives for rapid response to challenges, boosting participatory culture and building a sustainable environment for CCI development
- Difficult access to finance for state-funded cultural institutions
- Low salaries in the sector and lack of income-generating mechanisms
- Low awareness about CCI and opportunities in the sector

To address the policy gaps and obstacles hindering the development of CCI and increasing coordination between stakeholders several awareness-raising actions are planned. They include the establishment of the CCI Coordination Council to monitor and regulate the implementation of the CDS, the organization of a CCI Awareness kick-off event with the participation of all involved parties and actors, presentations about the importance and the role of CCI, and the latest trends for the targeted and specific audiences, such as public authorities, policymakers, and government representatives, cultural actors, cultural organizations, civil society representatives, and SMEs, media, influencers, bloggers, and journalists. Also, a series of awareness events about funding and development opportunities through various channels for all involved CCI actors will be organized and private investors and corporate social responsibility representatives of big corporations will be invited to meetings and seminars to encourage investment in the sector.

6.5 Communication and dissemination pillar

The dissemination and communication plan contains an overview of the strategy's stakeholders, all the procedures and data needed to work with all the strategy's stakeholders, and information on the strategy's progress towards the identified target groups.

This pillar ensures that future CSDs will be based on:

- ***Experience sharing***
- ***Know-how sharing***

- ***National and regional campaign***
- ***Local info campaign***
- ***Social Media strategy***

One of the ultimate goals of this CDS is to raise awareness about the role of CCI in the economy and the opportunities within the sector to stimulate innovation and sustainability of the crafts production in Sheki. For this purpose, several actions are planned several awareness-raising activities through seminars, networking events, and individual sessions for the general public and tailor-made focused meetings for specific groups such as policymakers and representatives of state cultural institutions, cultural professionals, private investors, civil society organizations, including bloggers, influencers, journalists, etc. A completely new dimension in the training of the CCI actors will be focused on raising their awareness about the environmental sustainability in production, which not only will benefit the ecological situation in Sheki but can serve as a unique selling point for the crafts.

Moreover, investment opportunities in the CCI of Sheki will be presented to large private companies, to be considered as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility goals. This action will not only attract new investment to the CCI of Sheki but will also motivate local CCI actors to develop their fund-raising skills and benefit from the real opportunities.

The CDS has intended different actions to encourage and create opportunities for the local CCI actors to participate in numerous local, regional, and international events, contests, and professional development programs. CDS plans to build cooperation with international organizations and platforms that bring together creative professionals from different parts of the world in one place to share and exchange their culture, traditions, techniques, and creativity. Michelangelo Foundation based in Italy is one of those organizations. Homo Faber event is a public exhibition of the finest European craftsmanship, staged every two years. Presenting the work of hundreds of master artisans and designers, Homo Faber would be a good opportunity for Sheki artisans to present themselves and learn from others. Another such opportunity is offered by the Life Beyond Tourism movement, which organizes annual festivals expressing cultural diversity. As part of the “Create Day” by the Michelangelo Foundation, short videos showcasing the work of local artisans will be showcased to the world creating mutual learning opportunities. It is planned to select one or two artisans each year to attend such events and bring back international experience to share with others. Another initiative is the Ceramic Artist Residency to be organized with ABAD Ceramics Center and announced across the European Route of Ceramics cities, of which Sheki is a member. The artists will be asked to join forces and work together during the residency to promote experience and knowledge exchange.

These actions not only help individual CCI actors’ development but together foster a more vivid creative scene of Sheki and promote its centuries-old craftsmanship legacy to the world.

EU4Culture



Cultural Development Strategy for Sheki City

2022-2025