



Felting in Raw

Revitalising Ancestral Wool Crafts

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So-called Bike-Felting or Raw Felting is a co-developed service that emerged from an experimental practice aimed at revitalising an ancestral felting technique. The developed practice would be applied to nature-based creative tourism as workshop-services using discarded local wool, a material with potential for socially engaged workshops. This project proposes that ancestral craft practices can be revitalised for new needs and contexts while maintaining cultural significance and fostering ecological reproductivity.

Felting is among the world's oldest textile techniques, originating in Central Asia thousands of years ago. Historical research traces the horse-aided felting to nomadic communities from Mongolia to the Iranian plateau, who perfected large-scale horse-aided felting to create thick wool coverings for yurts and garments, relying on collaborative work and the natural felting properties of raw fleece. They

rolled raw wool around heavy poles pulled by horses to create thick, weatherproof textiles for yurts. In this project, we revitalised some of this ancient knowledge in the Arctic context in order to co-develop a service for creative tourism in rural regions.

During the summer of 2024, a hands-on wool workshop took place in the village of Äkäslompolo, in Northern Finland. Inspired by the tradition of horse-felting, the team adapted the method to a low technology using simple materials. Students and researchers from the University of Lapland, along with local craft experts, formed the heart of the *Felted Futures* project's practical experimentation. The workshop was reflected in studies and shared through many publications (Ahmadi, 2025; Huhmarniemi & Hernández Cervantes, 2024; Huhmarniemi et al., 2025).

Wool from Finnish and Kainuun Harmaas sheep was sorted, carded, and layered into large mats (Figure 2). The group wrapped these mats around plastic pipes, soaked them in soapy water, and towed the rolls behind a bicycle, using the motion and pressure to bind the fibres into a felt blanket. Applied materials were items easily available in rural households.

◀ **FIGURE 1.** Ancestral craft was revitalized as a contemporary felting experiment at Äkäslömpö workshop. Drawing: Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.

◀◀ **FIGURE 2.** The working team is sorting wool for testing the revitalization of wool felting using common contemporary materials. Photograph: Dorsa Abolfazli, 2024.

Local knowledge holders contributed with their expertise, whilst students brainstormed design and architectural ideas for a felt-covered shelter.

The collaboration with the cafeteria Navetta Galleria linked a revitalised ancestral craft to tourism, suggesting opportunities for collaboration among farmers and rural entrepreneurs. The low-cost, mobile, and socially engaging activity proved potential for public demonstrations and visitor participation. Rolling the felt by electric bike would speed up the felting and suit these locations, where many visitors stop on their mountain biking hikes (Figure 1).

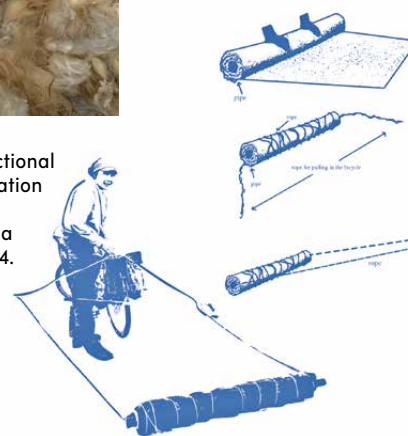
The revitalisation occurred on two levels: the creation of a local circular economy where wool became both a cultural attraction and a sustainable product, and the revitalisation of an ancestral technique with a contemporary twist. The materials used in the workshop were: wool fleece, pipes, ropes, canvas, water shower, natural soap, bubble wrap or a mesh layer, waterproof gloves, hot water, a carding drum and a bike (Figure 4). The materials and techniques are illustrated and shared in manuals (Hernández Cervantes, 2025a, 2025b).

Revitalising heritage craft can inspire nature-based creative tourism services; visitors could join in carding, sorting fibres in groups, learning about local sheep breeds, or simply pedalling the wool roll, turning labour into performance and education. They could create felt products such as decorative textiles and carpets, and the entire cycle from sheep to finished felt could be experienced within the region, offering authentic storytelling. The model of revitalisation presented in this experiment demonstrates how wool, regarded as waste, can be incorporated into creative tourism services that blend ecological responsibility with participatory craft, and how craft techniques migrate across continents and eras (Figure 3).



◀ **FIGURE 3.** Waste wool: a material for creative tourism services. Photograph: Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.

▶ **FIGURE 4.** Felting instructional leaflet presenting revitalization aspects at Villalno Final exhibition. Drawing: Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.



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