

The Cultural Heritage – A Matter of Training¹

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Abstract: *In this article, the author discusses the endeavor for a revival of past traditions and for their safeguarding in our contemporary world. What we call cultural heritage is not heritage strictly speaking, but an invented tradition, which we assimilate with certain alteration from the past in order to fit the present and its problems. Outlined is the decisive role of the researchers for defining and safeguarding the cultural heritage, as well as for interpreting it and transmitting it to the next generations through developing institutional policies and educational programs.*

Keywords: tradition, safeguarding, transmission, researcher, cultural policies, educational programs

GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The postmodern globalization made the world mobile and dynamic and our connections with the most distant places became possible. In the same time however, we are threatened with unification, which can reduce us to an *identification number*. What prevents us from the eventual depersonalization, what makes us *unique*, is our personal and collective history and the memory about it, implicated in our specific culture. For that reason in our world, otherwise dominated by money and by advertised goods, there is a significant endeavor for a revival of past traditions, for their preservation and reproduction.

During the time of socialism, when all our social and cultural life was controlled by the party-state, the concern for safeguarding the tradition was centralized, although partial, because only what was free of ‘ecclesiastical and religious delusions’ according to the party leaders was valued. There was a relatively uniform attitude towards the cultural heritage and the aim was to construct a monolithic and ideologically ‘correct’ image of it. The concept about *what* from the past and *how* it should be preserved and reproduced



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¹ This paper is a result of a survey conducted with in the project Policies for Safeguarding and Socialization of (Intangible and Movable) Cultural Heritage within the project BG05M2OP001-1.001-0001 Establishment and Development of “Heritage BG” Centre of Excellence (Operational Program “Science and Education for Intelligent Growth”, priority Axis 1 “Research and technological development”).

was regulated by the state and it was important only to persuade the governing 'factors' in the value of one phenomenon or another in order that it is produced as a 'cultural-historical heritage'.

After the collapse of socialism, it became clear that maintaining such a uniform idea about the cultural heritage is possible in two cases – when the people in the respective community share unified norms and notions about the world, as it was the case in the mediaeval premodern village commune before the Revival Period, or when the uniform idea is forcibly controlled by the state, as it is in any dictatorship. The postmodern society today has a mosaic and segmented character; it stratifies into various groups after ethnic, social, professional, cultural, religious and many other characteristics, which at that interweave and form different combinations between each other, which makes it impossible to construct a uniform and even less a monolithic view of the world and its basic dimensions. The Covid-19 pandemic offers a good example illustrating the contemporary parceling of knowledge, which – concerning the new virus – should be based on rationalism and scientifically proved facts, but in practice varies from different conspiratorial theories about its origin and spread, includes the deny of its existence whatsoever and comprises misuses of people's ignorance for obtaining profit.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITION

Just because the world is so many-sided and variable, looking for strongholds from the past is no less insistent. Is it however precisely the *heritage* from the past generations what we really need? As Angel Angelov wrote, "Heritage is something ready, while we create tradition. For that reason tradition is not merely the situation of an encounter between the past and the present, it is rather the situation of an impact emanated from the past and assimilated with endeavor and alteration in the present"². We speak of *heritage*, but actually, we create *tradition*, we *invent* it (as formulated by Eric Hobsbawm³), so that it fits the needs of our day and "is directed towards solving the problems of a perspective now, directed therefore towards the future"⁴.

Reproduced without any actualization, the cultural heritage is lifeless, as is lifeless the exhibit in the museum: an interesting or exotic object in itself, it requires an explanatory narrative, which should place it in the context of its past usage, so that it

would *speak* to the visitors and would engage them with its past role and messages. We do not try to preserve any past, but only the one that we value as significant and prestigious for the community, the one that outlines the community's representative identity. Moreover, the past is not given to us ready and once for all, it is constantly discovered and specified, it is a picture, in which we find new aspects and details at every careful scrutiny.

The role of the researchers in this process is decisive. We assume that the past belongs to us, but we rarely realize that someone has *constructed* it: someone has studied documents and archives, has read books and has investigated manuscripts in order to extract all those evidence and facts, which subsequently we assume as a self-understanding information. No less complex – and even more – is to establish *which* our folk heritage is: it requires investigation and field research, observations and interviews, photo and video recording, as well as studying in the course of time an oral culture, which is changeable and slipping out of fixing in exact frames. On the one hand, it depends on the limitations of the collective and the individual memory, and on the other hand, it is determined by the training, expectations and competences of the very researcher and by the researcher's adopted conception about this culture⁵.

In our days when things change quickly and the new ones attract greater interest and are more valued; when people try to preserve for a longer time their youth, while the old age loses the authority it once had, safeguarding the antiquity in its authentic previous form is impossible. As a counteraction to the now-a-days shifting cultural landscape is the adopted UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage⁶. It focuses on the cultural diversity as a value and pays special attention to the elements, which are threatened with extinction. Nevertheless, that program as well insists that the heritage should be applicable in people's life, that it should be a part of their actual practice. Therefore, figuratively speaking, antiquity should be *interpreted* and *modernized* in order to become explicit and effective, in order to preserve its messages and symbolism, in order to get involved in the real life history of the present generations.

The object of safeguarding in the UNESCO Convention 2003 are folk knowledge and skills and the people who master them. Those people have

² Angelov 1988.

³ Hobsbawm 1983.

⁴ Angelov 1988.

⁵ About the role of the researcher in *creating* the folk culture, see: Georgieva, Angelov 1987. See also: Georgieva 2020.

⁶ Convention 2003; about its implementation in Bulgaria see Georgieva 2017.

acquired their skills from their ancestors and are able to transmit them to the generations to come; they can present the activity's meaning and significance and hence can motivate its preservation in the contemporary world. Left by themselves, however, those people would be not capable of safeguarding the traditional activity, if their knowledge does not get involved in the investigations of the scholars: folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists. Scientific expertise is, which suggests an overall picture of the acquired knowledge about the traditional practices together with the existing in the past sequence and requirements for their performance, costumes and ritual objects, motivating notions and beliefs. Moreover, the scientific analysis and interpretation of their symbolism and coherence with the semiotic system of the folk culture as a whole adds the frame, which outlines those practices as significant and necessary for our contemporary society. Thus, the expertise of the folk bearer of knowledge and skills combined with the expertise of the researcher-specialist makes it possible to safeguard those pieces of the past, which suggest value landmarks for the world today and, constructing our identity, become strongholds for our self-confidence as individuals and as a community.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATION

The researcher's work however does not stop here. In order to transform the past into a heritage and tradition, it should be affirmed in society and transmitted to the next generations. In the folklore culture this happened naturally in the course of the direct oral communication and by imitation – every generation in its firsthand experience adopted the work and ritual activities, necessary for maintaining and reproducing life and along with them adopted all the practices and beliefs, which followed them, binding them with the notions and ideas of the community, with its entire worldview. Thus, singing and dancing, narration and ritual performances, together with producing material objects were learned as a practice and a spiritual horizon, as a wholesome way of living – the only known and possible for the people in the premodern village community.

As already mentioned, our reality today is quite different. Social activity is divided into multiple specialized spheres and in the course of one's individual development every person goes through various stages of education and training, and – depending on one's inclinations and interests

– through different professional or amateur circles, focused on definite skills and intellectual occupations. Acquiring what is necessary for one's individual growth, one chooses in parallel how to cultivate one's interests and talents involving in artistic activities, entertainments or spiritual practices. In that process, if not specially qualified and trained, one may omit or miss the activities, which we now denote with the term 'cultural heritage'. Promoted by researchers and social organizations, affirmed by the state as representative for the national identity, the cultural heritage, therefore, should form a part of the school programs and the extracurricular activities of children and young people, in order to become a value for them, to get integrated in their collective history, and to turn into a marker of their cultural belonging.

Article 14 of the UNESCO Convention 2003 clarifies that formal and informal educational programs should provide adoption and popularization of the intangible cultural heritage, as well as the methods for its safeguarding and prevention from extinction and oblivion. If the transmission is interrupted, practically this heritage ceases to exist. The material objects of cultural heritage are also threatened with extinction if the concern for their conservation and maintaining is neglected. Several articles in the *Cultural Heritage Act* obligate their owners, concessioners and users to carry out the necessary activities for their security, preservation and exhibition⁷. The only possibility for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage however is its transmission. When the traditional knowledge and skills are no more studied, when society is no more engaged in their meaning and actuality, practically they lose their vitality and significance. For that reason, experts and institutions are involved in developing educational programs, which would increase the social awareness and would maintain the stable existence of the cultural heritage in our world.

The documents adopted by UNESCO stipulate educational programs for schoolchildren and students, but no less in significance is the training of teachers for the schools and universities, for educational centers at museums and other institutions, for NGO-s and local organizations, among which especially appropriate are the Bulgarian *chitalishta* (culture centers)⁸. The need of creating a new subject, for instance *Traditional Culture*, is also emphasized, as well as the preparation of textbooks and school appliances, audio and video materials, and other instruments for education and training⁹. As pointed out by

⁷ *Zakon* 2009, articles 71 (1); 78, 6; 112, 1.

⁸ See *Nalbantyan-Hacheryan* 2019: 54 et seq.

⁹ *Nalbantyan-Hacheryan* 2019: 58-60.

Silva Nalbantyan-Hacheryan, in all the countries engaged with applying Convention 2003 the safeguarding of the cultural heritage is "better represented as laws, measures, activities, etc."¹⁰ However, developing a reliable legislative and normative basis itself, does not automatically ensure the transmission of traditional knowledge and skills; it is just the prerequisite for their passing on the next generations. If the young people acquire them without inner motive and

interests and only as an obligation imposed by the formal education, their adoption would not have the expected effect. Including in the educational programs practices from the past together with the mental context that brought them forth should be obviously accompanied by looking for such aspects of their applicability, which would be topical for the contemporary world and which would relate to the problems of the present social reality.

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Културното наследство – въпрос на обучение

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Авторката обсъжда усилията по възраждане и съхраняване на традициите от миналото в съвременния свят. Онова, което се означава като *културно наследство* обаче, не е точно самото *наследство*, а *изобретена традиция*, която е преобразувана и преосмислена, за да съответства на настоящето и на поставяните от него проблеми. Очертана е решаващата роля на изследователите за определяне и съхраняване на културното наследство, както и за неговото анализиране и предаване на следващите поколения чрез създаването на институционални политики и образователни програми.

¹⁰ *Nalbantyan-Hacheryan* 2019: 61.