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The Role of Stakeholders in Practicing Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Example of the Koniaków Lace

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes activities focused on cultural heritage resources, undertaken from a local position. The theoretical considerations refer to the example of the Koniaków lace. This handicraft, despite the changing reality, for more than 100 years has continuously been a manifestation of the region's tradition. Local lace makers adapt their forms to new emerging needs. The educational or commercial activity concentrated around the lace makes this skill an important bonding element for the local community. The lively activity of dissemination and promotion of the Koniaków lace resulted in an entry to UNESCO's National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017. The Koniaków lace also became one of the elements representing the Silesian region at the 2022 EXPO in Dubai. These events are the result of cultural policies implemented at the level of the institution and the result of the activity of the local community, influencing and shaping the frequently emotional relationships within it. The purpose of this article is to present practices using Koniaków lace, which are related to such issues as cultural policy, heritage management, or community empowerment.

KEYWORDS: intangible cultural heritage, heritage management, Koniaków lace, local community empowerment

Introduction

Cultural heritage is the imperative for the functioning of numerous organizations more or less structured or formalized in nature. Inscribing itself into this trend, Poland is not an exception. Programs conducted by local, regional, national or, finally, international institutions – especially those initiated by the UNESCO – mobilize many groups and communities. The activity conducted in this field gives one the opportunity to safeguard and disseminate one's own

cultural resources, but, simultaneously, makes it possible to carry out goals that are not always in accordance with the accepted assumptions of doctrinal documents dedicated to heritage. The instrumentalization of heritage influences the continuing vitality of many cultural expressions, but not infrequently it comes down to sustaining inequality, dominance of a majority group or unbalanced development of privileged spheres, when political and financial elites use their positions for particular interests (Bendix, Eggert, Peselmann 2013).

The efforts towards reliable implementation of the directives found in programs concerning safeguarding and support of the development of cultural heritage are within the purview of many subjects, and appropriate management of cultural goods invariably constitutes an important factor in carrying them out. The analysis of practices realized in relation to heritage management has forced many groups, including academic ones, to revise their earlier ways of thinking about heritage and the actions undertaken for its protection and to begin critical studies over heritage and its role in contemporary culture (Nowacki 2020). Academic considerations are accompanied by “field” activity undertaken by the stakeholders of heritage, that is, all individuals, groups, organizations, institutions interested in heritage in the given territory that can indirectly or directly influence and shape its fate. The aforementioned relationships are of a different nature, strength and significance, and the range of their influence can be realized on the following planes: legal, functional, cultural, emotional, economic or ecological (Pawłowska 2010: 66).

The present text contains an analysis of activities focused on resources of cultural heritage undertaken from a local position by its stakeholders. This study is particularly concerned with the role of the community leader, Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut – an ethnologist and enthusiast of the region from Koniaków. Her dynamic and creative activities significantly influence the directions of the development of the handicraft that is the lace, as well as the nature of relationships in the local community to which this heritage belongs. Theoretical reflections pertain to the example of the Koniaków lace which, despite the changing reality, for over 100 years has continuously constituted an expression of tradition of Koniaków – a small village in the Silesian Beskids in the south of Poland. Meeting the changes head-on, the local lace makers adapt the lace’s form to the new emerging needs. In turn, the lively activity concerning the dissemination and promotion of the local handicraft resulted in the lace being inscribed into the UNESCO National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017. The lace was also one of the elements representing the Silesian Voivodeship at the 2022 World EXPO in Dubai. These events are a result of cultural policies conducted at the level of institutions, but also an expression of the activity of the stakeholders themselves, while the result of these practices shapes the relationships within the community, which are not infrequently emotional. This means that in broader context, the practices connected with using the Koniaków lace are related to contemporary phenomena connected with cultural policy, heritage management or local community empowerment.

In the text I use material collected during field research. I have been researching the phenomenon of the Koniaków lace for over a dozen years, using ethnographic tools – interview and participatory observation. The interviews with the lace makers and their leader, Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut, whose fragments can be found in the text, were conducted in Koniaków in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, I use existing sources, namely, subject literature.

The Theoretical and Methodological Framework

An important issue in the discourse on heritage is emphasizing the fact that it has an intangible dimension and that it is socially constructed (Ashworth 2015), and not simply existing in the shape of physical artifacts whose values are easier to identify, capture and assign. The expressions of intangible culture are dynamic and temporary in nature, while:

the paradigm of late modernity insists on seeing cultural heritage in dynamic and individualized manner, as a phenomenon shaped in an interactive process of social structurization and not as existing, solidified conglomerate of cultural elements arbitrarily deemed significant and valuable – from the point of view of history, aesthetics or national/regional ideology. Cultural heritage is not a dead group of symbolic meanings suspended in social vacuum, on the contrary – it evolves and, simultaneously, has enormous influence on regional identity (Nieroba, Czerner, Szczepański 2009: 8).

These conclusions require practices concerning safeguarding and managing of cultural resources different from what has come before.

Another extremely significant factor that demands unusual attention in activities connected with maintaining the vitality of heritage is the now common commodification of cultural goods. Assigning commercial dimension to cultural resources results in many consequences, major among which are transformation and codification of cultural content so as to reduce it to the rank of commodity with exchange value (Mathews 2005). These practices are the easiest to grasp in the context of tourism (Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2010, 2021). The commercial nature of activities making use of heritage resources resorts to manipulating those of its values that are in customer demand. As pointed out by Robert Hewison, appropriately “packaged” originality and authenticity are the main offer of the “heritage industry” (Hewison 1987), and become a source of interesting practices carried out e.g. in creative sectors. These practices may reduce the cultural achievements of the past generations to fetishization and reduction of their functions for mercantile purposes. It happens that looking for income streams in cultural resources leads, in turn, to hyperactivity in finding and commodifying the heritage content that in this context might – as it usually occurs – lose what makes it heritage. The commercialized form, devoid of the original context and of its stakeholders, becomes a kind of an empty

shell. Simultaneously, the exploitation of heritage outside its locality, in global circulation, frequently results in the heritage undergoing processes of alienation in its native environment, ceasing to be own heritage (Ashworth 2005).

In opposition to these processes there are initiated activities whereby commercialization of heritage is empowering in nature and serves the communities to which the stakeholders of heritage belong to fulfill their own goals (Comaroff, Comaroff 2011).

The engagement of heritage's stakeholders in its safeguarding has diverse goals. Dissemination of knowledge about cultural resources located at a particular place or with a particular community works in favor of increasing awareness about historical conditions of the experienced reality, which is a result of human collectivities that are varied with regards to ethnicity, religion or culture, and knowledge about the natural environment that to a large extent conditions the shaping of this reality. The heritage one is aware of undergoes evaluation, and only subsequently is it safeguarded and its vitality – maintained (Thurley 2005).

Obviously, extracting knowledge from the past is not infrequently connected with calling forth information that was left unsaid or deliberately forgotten, which then leads to stirring up conflicts or the necessity to revise the commonly accepted truth about past events. It can also, especially by the means of commercial demands of the market and under their influence, strengthen stereotypical image of features ascribed to stakeholders of the given heritage, or to the heritage as such.

In this situation, heritage management becomes an incredibly difficult task, as it may be an opportunity to overcome barriers existing in social consciousness, it may result in a necessity to re-interpret issues omitted from public discourse due to ideological decisions, but it may also cause a revival of contentious, conflict-generating attitudes (Tunbridge 2018).

This means that the strategy of heritage management, although concerning artifacts of the past, should be considered in the categories of designing the future. In this case, such activities should be accompanied by a reflection connected with the rank of the undertaken tasks. After all, this pertains to practices safeguarding the legacy of previous generations, regardless of its tangible or intangible nature. Simultaneously, the conducted activities constitute a kind of a bookend connecting what was with what will happen, and the result will be translated to formation of subsequent generations. It is impossible not to consider these activities as a certain mission, accompanied by the sense of sharing responsibility for shaping the future. Management of heritage resources is a task that can be carried out by the means of constructing conscious relationships between the recipients of the offer and the heritage stakeholders, with regard to needs and expectations of both sides. However, it ought to be kept in mind that these postulates are an ideational approach, which in reality frequently bends to the pressure of consumer rigor and needs (Kobyliński 2020).

As sketched above, key points of activities whose background consists in cultural heritage resources find their reflection in practices carried out in this regard in Poland. Traditions of such activities date back to the end of the 18th century and ever since their inception they have constituted the subject of efforts of many different groups and communities. The nature and the dynamics of the undertaken and conducted activities have depended on numerous conditions, including the cultural policy carried out by the state in its national, European as well as global context (Brzezińska 2015: 50–54). In the recent years the biggest impulse to undertake activities connected with wide-ranging safeguarding of heritage has consisted in Poland ratifying the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Humanity’s Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO n.d.), as it set directions for many activities organized locally, bottom-up, as well as centrally, by the appropriate institutions founded for that purpose. Many subjects aided financially by administration at central, voivodeship or county level¹ were obliged to maintain cultural goods, including heritage. The newly emerging reality has also become an impulse to revive the so-called third sector, that is, non-governmental activities, which has resulted in the creation of non-profit organizations, associations and cooperatives, focusing their activities directly on local communities – or indirectly, drawing inspiration from native culture. Additionally, the opportunity to gain financial aid from various sources, including European funds², to finance activities supporting local development has become the reason for many indirect phenomena. The process of empowerment of local communities is fundamental among these: it relies on participation and dialogue when it comes to activities concerned with maintaining the longevity of heritage. Another phenomenon worth mentioning pertains to activities that have resulted in the creation of cultural reality based on the resources of tradition, not infrequently devised artificially in pursuit of obtaining funding.

In the new reality, regional culture, at whose core there is heritage, formed with the efforts of indigenous community, has become a significant element of policies conducted both centrally and on local levels as a certain panacea against the pressure of globalization. The necessity to safeguard, and, as follows, to conduct planned activities with regard to documenting, disseminating and promoting cultural heritage was adopted as strategic aim for institutional subjects and for initiatives undertaken at a grassroots level, spontaneously by local communities. Continuously for over two decades, the activities whose axis is cultural heritage have been very divergent, and their influence can be observed in economic and social development of local communities, and, at the same time, in the shaping of national culture. Indeed,

1 Among popular programs supporting the activities of the stakeholders there are ministry programs, including “Kultura ludowa i tradycyjna” (Folk and traditional culture), “Etnopolska” (Ethno-Poland) or “Mistrz tradycji” (Tradition master).

2 Due to Koniaków being located at the Poland-Czechia border, it is possible to use transnational projects, e.g. Interreg or Visegrad Funds.

cultural heritage – as a central tenet of the local community – conditions its development, develops identity on the level of an individual, a group, and – more broadly – a nation.

Traditions of Making the Koniaków Lace as the Legacy of Generations

The Koniaków lace (Pol. koronka koniakowska) is the name of crocheted lace that for over a hundred years has constituted one of the most outstanding manifestations of the artistic culture of the Cieszyn Silesia and Polish folk culture. The villages in the Silesian Beskids have become its seat – especially Koniaków, whose name has become inseparable from the lace, pointing, on the one hand, to its origins, and on the other – to its unique form. The attractiveness and craftsmanship behind the execution made it possible for the local lace to survive the pressure of factory-made city products; as a result, to this day they enjoy continued vitality. The unique motifs arranged in original compositions and intricate technique perfected over generations have become the pride of local women, and, more broadly, the inhabitants of the region. This made it possible for the Koniaków lace to be inscribed into the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017.

The presence of the lace in folk tradition was closely connected with the need to adorn one's clothing, especially such parts thereof as mobcaps, blouses or aprons. In the Cieszyn Silesia lace making had been present since the Renaissance, initially fulfilling the needs of the court and burgher culture that developed in towns of the region, e.g. Cieszyn, Skoczów or Jabłonków (currently in Czechia). The contact between country folk, including the Silesian Gorals, with the town, and the possibility to imitate the town way of dressing aided in the development of the Koniaków lace. The lace ornaments were created thanks to the talent of the local women, who initially imitated other patterns to develop their own style in time (Dobrowolscy 1936). These processes took place at the beginning of the 20th century. According to research and preserved archival texts, the ability to make crocheted lace was supposed to slowly gain popularity among local girls, together with the increase of level of education in the countryside and the opportunity to sell the lace to tourists (Kiereś 2012; Czerwińska 2018a).

In order to make the lace, local women used a simple crocheting needle, usually one they made themselves (the dialect name is *heknadla*), and thread – white, very fine floss, imported from Turkiye or from the bordering Czechoslovakia. The technique of making the lace, or crocheting, was named *heklowanie* in the dialect. The manufacturing process invariably consists in preparing particular elements, usually alluding to floral motifs which, in the next stage, are connected into specific forms. The difficulty of making these adornments lies in the fact that the design of the lace only exists in the author's mind: its shape, size of the motifs or their arrangement is not additionally worked out on paper. Lace makers, especially those exceptionally talented, developed their own patterns, which would in time become their



Fig. 1. European Heritage Days in Koniaków, 2019. Photo: Kinga Czerwińska.

hallmark. As they say, “it is like handwriting, we will recognize who made what.” The secrets of one’s workshop, like legacy, would be passed down to subsequent generations of creators.

As the handicraft skills developed, there appeared lace forms that had no direct connection to adorning clothes of rural women, but they gained approval, and, most importantly, market in towns. This pertains especially to napkins, table runners, tablecloths, but also gloves, collars, baby hats, decorations for baby wraps. In turn, an entire gamut of women’s clothing started to be made with the lace: blouses, skirts, dresses, hats. There also occurred special, occasional orders for wedding dresses or baby christening gowns. The development of other, city forms would intensify with the disappearance of the traditional way of dressing, which resulted in the lace “becoming independent”. New forms of the lace were sold in towns, especially in Wisła, where tourists would come.

The vitality of the Beskid *heklowanie* after the Second World War was undoubtedly strengthened by the activity of Cepelia – Centrala Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego (The Headquarters for Folk and Artistic Industry)³. In 1949 Maria Gwarkowa, an exceptionally talented lace maker from Koniaków, gathered a group of about 200 women from Koniaków and the surrounding villages, with whom she undertook cooperation with Cepelia. The relationships created at that time shaped the creation of this handicraft for long years and influenced its present condition. The solidified renown of the Koniaków

3 Cepelia was the name of the main organization working to support individual folk creativity and bring together associations for folk and artistic handicraft. It existed between 1949 and 1990.

lace persisted throughout the period of Polish People's Republic (1952–1989), becoming one of the most characteristic determinants of the region, and more broadly – of Polish folk culture. Amazing all with their uniqueness and perfect execution, the lace gained popularity among: officials, celebrities of the cultural world, dignitaries in Poland and abroad. Regular customers could be found among clothing companies, film crews, regional music groups. Exceptional works were also acquired by museums in Poland and abroad for their collections (Czerwińska 2018a).

However, with time oversaturation with “folk art” weakened the popularity of the lace. Neither did the political and economic transformations happening after 1990 in Poland favor the lace. The introduction of free market and opening the borders to foreign goods, especially coming from the West, resulted in reduction of interest in native, traditional products. Lack of financial satisfaction and the loss of institutional support⁴ caused the lace makers to lose material support and social prestige. This state directly influenced the lack of interest in continuing local handiwork traditions, growing among the young generation.

Yet, the stagnation did not last long: at the end of the last decade of the 20th century lace making experienced a revival. This process began with the creation of strings (a model of ladies' underwear). The emergence of this frivolous type of underwear resulted in a landslide of events in Koniaków that woke up from lethargy both the lace makers and the folk culture scholars. It was mostly ethnographers and cultural anthropologists who spoke up in the discussion caused by lace strings, once again striving to answer the question concerning the state of folk culture (Kuligowski 2007; Czerwińska 2018b). Putting aside the details of this discourse, the fact that lace gained a new life is of key importance here.

The Koniaków Lace as Potential for Culture-Forming and Performative Activities

The renewed interest in the handicraft skills in lace making aided in redefining the lace's place in local culture. The wave of increased interest in the Koniaków lace awakened the imaginations of its creators, who started to offer an entirely new assortment of goods, adjusted to the challenges and trends in fashion – both in clothes and in house decorating. An almost limitless range of Christmas and Easter decorations started to be produced, together with flowers for particular occasions, flower bouquets, dolls, key rings, necklaces, rosaries, “dream catchers” and many others. Simultaneously with the lace's functioning in its traditional environment, its new, modern aspect was being developed due to artists and designers for whom the lace became an inspiration for works following the ethno-design trends⁵.

4 This concerns mainly the weakened role of Cepelia.

5 In 2012, in the orangery of the Cieszyn Castle there was organized an exhibition “Koronkowa Robota” (The Lace Work), presenting examples of contemporary design drawing on the tradition of lace-making in Poland, including examples connected with the Koniaków center (Zamek Cieszyn n.d.).

However, the growing range of products did not result in the old particular nature of the Koniaków lace becoming blurred: as I have previously mentioned, it was characterized by a color scheme reduced to white and beige, as well as by a selection of floral motifs. It thus seems important to note that among the newly made lace artworks there still function traditional patterns and forms, including mainly tablecloths, and decor developed over generations is being used in new arrangements, e.g. on Christmas baubles.

The potential inherent in the lace is not limited only to its aesthetic merits. The fact that the lace became an original regional attraction was taken advantage of on many levels, which increased together with the social and cultural transformations in the last twenty years. The initiators of these activities were both institutional subjects and private ones, mainly connected with the local community. One should definitely mention here the Istebna County Culture Center (Pol. Gminny Ośrodek Kultury/GOK) and the owners of private regional rooms, concerned with the promotion of local culture. In these activities, the lace was most often presented as a part of resources of the local culture of Silesian Gorals⁶. Its original, exceptional merits started to be presented at an event dedicated especially to the lace – the Lace Days (Pol. Dni Koronki), which have been regularly taking place in August since 2013. One of the initiators of this idea was the local regionalist, Tadeusz Rucki, who organized this event in his own Galeria na Szańcach in Koniaków, with the cooperation of representatives of the local community, together with The Museum of Lace – the Memorial Chamber of Maria Gwarek in Koniaków, The Chamber of Creative Work of the Kamieniarz-Kubaszczyk Family and the Istebna County Culture Center. Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut, its employee at the time, was engaged in work around the event on behalf of that last institution. From the beginning, this popularizing event “with the lace in the starring role” was arranged as an activity including a range of different attractions: from exhibitions and fashion shows, to workshops, authors’ meetings with local creators, to lectures concerning not only lace making, but also folk artistic culture and native traditions. The success of the event led its organizers to continuing and exploring their activities, making them an important element of the region’s promotion⁷.

The growing interest coming in from outside the local community revealed the culture-making and commercial potential of the lace, attractive

6 This pertains e.g. to events taking place during the Beskid Culture Week.

7 One of the most interesting initiatives undertaken by Ligocka-Kohut was preparing the world’s largest lace, which was inscribed into the Guinness World Records. The goal was carried out thanks to funds obtained from the Ministry for Culture and National Heritage and Vysegrad Funds. A group of 5 lace makers set out to prepare the lace. The artistic concept involved preparing a round tablecloth with a 5-meter diameter; in order to make it, 5 kilometers of thread (Turkish cotton fillet) were used. Out of this thread, over 8 thousand elements with motifs typical for traditional lace were prepared. Subsequently, they were arranged into a composition retaining the centric arrangement of motifs in 20 rows. The entire task took the lace makers 5 months (from April to August 2013). The official, ceremonial presentation and inscription into World Records took place on August 18th, 2013, precisely during the Lace Days.



Fig. 2. Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut at the Koniaków Lace Centre, 2023. Photo: Kinga Czerwińska.

for the contemporary recipient. This became a stimulus for undertaking new activities headed by the aforementioned Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut. Known in the region for her earlier activities conducted on behalf of the GOK and as local ethnographer, she decided to become the leader of the community of lace makers and centralize the activities utilizing the potential of lace-making, which, in her opinion, remains underutilized⁸. This meant giving up work at the GOK, setting up her own business and, in the course of subsequent steps, taking out a loan for the purchase of a building that would become headquarters of the newly created initiative. As a result, The Koniaków Lace Foundation (Fundacja Koronki Koniakowskiej) and the Koniaków Lace Centre in Koniaków were founded (13th September 2019): the latter hosts an exhibition presenting the history of the lace and selected lace works, as well as a shop. The upper stories of the building contain the office and workshop space. After such arrangements, this space made it possible to create the Lace Museum, which was inscribed into the register of private museums (2020). The main goal of activities is to concentrate all activities connected with the making of the Koniaków lace, as well as to centralize and to aid the networking in the community of lace makers. The success of these activities and their dynamic character caused the leader to set up the commercial company Koronki Koniakowskie (2022).

8 This decision was strengthened by the Koniaków lace being inscribed into the UNESCO National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017.

The period of the initialization of these activities happened concurrently with the difficult pandemic situation⁹, which resulted in many institutions slowing down or stopping their functioning. For Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut, it was a difficult period, especially given the undertaken conceptual and loan obligations; however, it did not mean stopping the initiated activities, only their partial modification. Among numerous activities one should mention: organizing permanent and temporary exhibitions, showcases of the lace making skills connected with workshops, or active participation in the European Days of Cultural Heritage (the first edition 2019, then annually).

A new interesting idea was an educational activity – a proposition of summer school for children (in 2021 and 2022). Children had the opportunity to visit selected lace makers in their homes and listen to them talk about how they once learned lace making from their mothers or grandmothers.

Organizing workshops is a constant element of the functioning of the Lace Centre. Workshop activities are designed for a broad spectrum of target groups: all age groups (children and adults), for the locals and visitors, tourists, fans of handiwork. An important aspect of this activity was also organizing workshops for the lace makers themselves, in order to increase their professional skills¹⁰. This initiative met with enthusiasm of its participants and became an impulse for reflection, and, as a result, perhaps a change in perceiving one's own creativity and its rank. This concerns e.g. the frequent depreciation of their own work among the lace makers, resulting both from the common perception of folk culture (including lace making) in the categories of low culture, and from the lack of appropriate remuneration for the work. This is confirmed by the words often spoken by the lace makers: "we are simple village women, we are no artists".

For this very reason among the tenets adopted by the leader there is a clear and transparent system of remuneration for the work done. It happens that despite their many years of activity, it is the first time that the lace makers receive payments without delay and in amounts that satisfy them. Ligocka-Kohut talks about these issues the following way:

I opened this shop because it has to exist. I wanted the lace makers to be able to sell their things. But really it was the lace makers who opened my eyes to what is important to them – they have to make money! It was a total shock to them when they started bringing [things] here and make money. And I paid them immediately, and it was a shock that I only take the profit margin and turn it over. After the first three months they came and said that they had already made so much money with me as never before. In other places they are told after three years that nothing

9 This pertains to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic which started in 2019 in Chinese Wuhan. The SARS-CoV-2 virus, rapidly spreading around the world, radically influenced global daily life.

10 A cycle of such workshops took place in 2022 and concerned e.g. building one's own brand and business activities.

was sold. I don't negate that, but [those places] made money on [the lace makers], paid them one zloty each, and took 20. And the lace makers were happy with that one zloty. And it could be that someone would be making a tablecloth for three months, and then someone came to pick up the order but they would say they wouldn't pay so much, because it was too much. And they offered half the price, and [the lace maker] had to sell it, she would cry, but what was she supposed to do. I didn't know about this, it only started coming out. Nobody respected them. I had this situation that one elderly lady came and brought me a lace, and when she returned in a week and I paid her, she started crying horribly that she had never made so much money. [...] But the young lace makers think differently, they value themselves and they don't have a problem putting a good price on their goods.

The financial considerations were the key stimulus for the local women to develop their lace making skills. The extremely poor terrain of weak farming efficiency, distant from industrial centers, influenced the pauperization of the native population, especially the marginalized position of women sentenced to being financially dependent on men. The possibility of making money with the work of their own hands was an incredibly important achievement for many Goral women, both in the context of supplementing the house budget and increasing their own sense of self worth. Despite civilizational changes, this situation continues to this day. For the lace makers profit and the opportunity to make money is the imperative behind their activities. As a result, for many years the ability to make one's own original pattern was kept secret and handed down only to the closest female family members. "You have bread in your hands", the lace makers would say to the young adepts in order to encourage them to develop their skills. Simultaneously, there existed internal competition that forced the lace makers to keep their finished works or their channels of distribution secret, and resulted in reluctance to teach lace making at a larger scale, e.g. during workshops.

This problematic situation causes the leader to constantly work on increasing the prestige of the local handiwork and strengthening the position of the lace as artistic creation, and of the lace makers as artists. Emphasizing the sense of individual self-worth as well as the artistic and cultural value of the offered products is what drives the leader of the lace making community. This is what she has to say:

I always come prepared, well-dressed, made up to the meetings. I drive a good car with the lace logo on the side. I always have on hand a range of activities, goals, a business plan. This intimidates my interlocutors. They expect a dull person in a gray, stretched out sweater. Like from a museum, where one only talks about what could be done. I think that this is how I win. This was also so with the EXPO. I shocked them

with my professionalism. And my vision of the lace, which they weren't prepared for. And which they didn't expect, because they imagine the countryside to be drab, uncouth.

Another sphere of initiatives focused around the lace are promotional activities. The lace makers participate in numerous local tourist campaigns, advertising the region. These are radio, television and Internet programs, articles in the press. There is an extremely active fanpage of the lace makers on Facebook (Centrum Koronki Koniakowskiej n.d.; Koronki Koniakowskie n.d.). They continuously participate in many folklore-themed events, such as The Week of Beskid Culture (Pol. Tydzień Kultury Beskidzkiej) or the Lace Days (Pol. Dni Koronki). Another interesting event was participation in the TV program *Mam Talent* in 2022¹¹, where representatives of the lace makers presented their skills. An extremely intriguing popularizing idea consisted in the project of writing a crime novel for children, entitled *Koronkowa robota, czyli wzór na kryminalną historię* (Lace Work, or a Pattern for a Crime Story), undertaken by Grzegorz Kasdepke – a popular author of children's books.

Among numerous activities there also appear those strictly commercial in nature. In the Lace Centre there functions a shop selling the lace and other products “with the lace in their background”, e.g. chocolates, lollipops, a “Memory” matching game, underwear, clothes, ceramics decorated with lace motifs created by the local artists, publications and others.

However, the most important event in the recent years for the lace making community was participation in the 2020 EXPO in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, from 27 January to 2 February 2022. The Koniaków lace popularized the potential of the Silesian Voivodeship: its natural, technological and cultural values, together with other partners: the Śląsk Song and Dance Ensemble, the Silesian Aviation Cluster and the Silesian Science Festival. The project of arranging the pavilion during Silesian Days was based on showing the dynamics of the region: the modernity located in technology and scientific development, and the tradition of the place and its cultural heritage resources. The lace constituted an extremely significant element that brought the whole thing together, for example, demonstrations of the skills involved in its making were prepared for the occasion, as well as an exhibition of the traditional lace and artistic installations inspired by the lace made by NeSpoon¹², and fashion shows of two collections of women's clothing designed by Beata Bojda (*Ethno by B. Bojda* and *Flowers of Koniaków*). The Poland Pavilion achieved spectacular success and enjoyed considerable popularity among the visitors¹³. However, many de-

11 An entertainment TV program where the participants compete against each other presenting various skills. The program is based on the British format “Got Talent”.

12 NeSpoon is the pseudonym of Elżbieta Dymna – a Polish artist creating street art who uses lace from various parts of the world in her activities (NeSpoon 2021).

13 The Pavilion received the prestigious The Best Large Pavilion award in the World Expo Award competition organized by the EXHIBITOR Magazine (Białas 2022).



Fig. 3. Lace makers from Koniaków at the EXPO 2022 exhibition in Dubai. Photo: Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut.

cision makers had to be persuaded to agree to the presence of the lace in this enterprise. This is what the leader – Ligocka-Kohut – has to say on the subject:

The best example of an idea appearing from God knows where – it just appears in my head, or someone suggests something – is exactly the Dubai project, which started with the architect inviting me to his team; he designed a trade pavilion, but he didn't succeed, didn't win that project, and he told me about the Expo exhibition, about the fair. He told me: You should write a concept for the Dubai exhibition, because I think that the lace is a great material to be shown there. [...] This collection is not just the largest piece of lace, because I didn't think we would break another record, but everything was somehow in there. I described it all beautifully and sent it to the Polish Investment and Trade Agency. And the next day, at 9 a.m., I got a call from Ms. Marta Szewińska. And she says: When I opened the mail and read this concept, I thought this was the most difficult thing that could appear in the entire Dubai exhibition. And she says, I will do everything for it to be there, I don't organize the funds and don't provide the organizer with anything but the place, other than such promotion, I don't provide transport, funds to finance the exhibition. It

is like this, everyone needs to want to be there on their own. This is why I had to think about financial support, about the Voivodeship Office, look for [that] myself. [...] And then, in November, they called, inviting me to a meeting, to say that they are planning to become engaged in the Expo, that I should come, that I should prepare a presentation to be shown at the management meeting. So I prepared that presentation, very detailed still, I showed a common project, various work, etc. And then at the beginning of the year it turned out that the [Voivodeship] Marshall accepted that, although he wasn't convinced. [...] But the success was enormous, people would come, after two days everyone would tell everyone else how beautiful we had it there. And we had workshops for children, done by the University of Silesia. It was amazing, because people would come and bring others. And the Princess wanted to come visit us, she only wanted to see our doilies. And there was huge chaos with the bodyguards. And she came, and she wanted to listen to me for more than those 3 minutes they gave me. And we weren't allowed to touch her, but our lace makers starting hugging her, because what do they know about the protocol.

The lace is at the center of the activities I am presenting, but there would not be the lace in such shape – in form and in activity, if not for the leader – Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut. The variety and dynamics of the activities she has been conducting bring about many specific results that can be subject to typology. Among those there is certainly the lace as a material artifact of creative abilities. In its ideological and workshop assumptions, the lace refers to and creatively re-creates old traditions. This pertains to white and beige colored tablecloths, and to the processes of preserving the region's heritage. Simultaneously, there appear new incarnations of the lace in the shape of innovative motifs, patterns, colors.

Behind the lace works there are specific people – stakeholders who represent different creative approaches. Among the lace makers there are both those who hold on faithfully to traditional patterns and those for whom the old formal workshop canon becomes a starting point for further creative pursuits. *Heklowanie* remains a common ability, but achieving artistic heights both in terms of mastering the handicraft skill and original conceptualization of patterns is achieved by few creators¹⁴. And although in the recent years the interest in lace making has increased, this does not translate significantly to an increase in the number of people who try their hand at this activity and improve their skills. Young girls are reluctant to explore the secrets of knowledge connected with lace making, as it involves precision and time investment. This has not been improved by the depreciation of broadly understood folk culture, and the lace makers themselves, used to the commonality of

¹⁴ Among the currently most talented lace makers there are Zuzanna Ptak, Beata Legierska or Mariola Wojas, all awarded titles in numerous competitions.



Fig. 4. Lace makers from Koniaków at the EXPO 2022 exhibition in Dubai. Photo: Lucyna Ligocka-Kohut.

heklowanie, frequently do not see their own abilities as significant. As follows, if the Koniaków lace is supposed to stand the test of time, it is extremely important to conduct activities aiming to change people's attitudes towards native traditions, including those connected with handicraft. The educational aspect seems key here. However, it is not always possible for it to be carried out, as on the one hand, there is a shortage of funds, and on the other – of instructors, lace makers for whom their own original patterns and compositions and technique perfected over generations are their largest capital. They do not always want to share it, fearing plagiarism both among the native community, and Chinese imitations.

In addition to the lace, there also appears an entire range of products inspired by the lace, but in a modern approach (the previously listed assortment and an original collection of underwear, or woolen winter clothing using patterns typical for lace¹⁵). These products are the result of popularizing and commercial activities; the funds gained from the latter ensure the continuity of functioning of subjects founded by the leader. Indeed, financial issues constitute another aspect connected with the presence of the lace. The problem of lack of appropriate financing of the cultural sector is something that national institutions, regional ones and private subjects all struggle with. The lack or

15 Underwear sets, marked *Lusi Lace Lingerie@Swimwear*, were created in cooperation with the Polish underwear company DALIA Lingerie, while the woolen clothing is called *Lusi by Wool*. Both product lines are Ligocka-Kohut's auterial ideas.

low level of constant, statutory subsidies results in the need for obtaining outside funds, mainly through applying to grant programs. Profits from commercial activity are not enough to cover the costs of the undertaken activities connected with safeguarding heritage. An additional aspect can be found in a particular relation of power and tension between public institutions that are formally responsible for the safeguarding and private initiatives. As a result, it can happen that support for these initiatives comes from private funds. This is how the leader describes it:

Since I started working with this culture in 2012, until today, there have been about 60 different project applications. I wrote smaller, larger [applications] to local [bodies], to national ones, to the European Union, to the ministry, to the Party, to Poland, to the National Institute of Heritage. Actually, I keep looking for new possibilities and there are some. [...] I figured out that on the one hand, I am bound by the projects, because I simply have to make my living, and as a result, I look for these projects. But that isn't all. On the other hand, I never hand in a project that I don't feel. I never make a project just for the sake of making it, and I just always have to feel it myself, and then I enjoy it, and then it all works out. I am entirely engaged and [the project] is just all fun, because this is what I feel. And I think I give this energy to those who enter these projects with me.

Unstable financial situation and the complicated, work-consuming path to obtaining such support is demotivating. It may happen that obtaining funds for activities from the subsidy pool of the local authorities constitutes a kind of blackmail or pressure. In Ligocka-Kohut's words,

I prepared the latest Lace Days on my own, without county subsidies, even though they had money for me guaranteed in their budget. They delayed paying it out for a long time, and then they accused me of improper submission of the application and mistakes in the contract. They actually don't see the lace at all now, they omit me, because I succeeded. And this hurts them, they are jealous that I don't work for the GOK and the [county] office. [...] They slapped me with unsubstantiated taxes, I had to hire a lawyer and I won. I had a similar situation when I put the exhibition with the largest lace into the Dubai project. I organized this while still at the GOK and I knew they wouldn't lend me [the lace]. And I was right. They didn't¹⁶.

16 This situation forced Ligocka-Kohut to organize the second instance of breaking the Guinness world record for the largest lace. The record was broken at the beginning of 2022, right before the EXPO itself; 4 lace makers participated, using up 61 kilometers of thread for their 4 month work. The diameter of the lace is 5,24 meters.

Institutional protection is important for the existence and longevity of heritage, but, as reality shows, it is not indispensable. An important issue that is worth emphasizing is the fact that the activity under discussion includes not only financial or popularizing aspects, but also those connected e.g. with education, or documentation of the phenomenon. Simultaneously, the Lace Centre took upon itself tasks connected e.g. with inscribing the Koniaków lace into the National Cultural Heritage List, which had been carried out with various intensity by the Istebna GOK. In this light the Centre should be treated as a partner of the undertaken activities, and not competition. The attractiveness of the activities undertaken by the Lace Centre and their dynamics, the freedom in creating ideas and carrying them out, commercial considerations and the visibly increasing benefits for the local community do not invoke similar enthusiasm in everyone. There emerge accusations of appropriating common heritage and particular animosities with the former employer (the GOK), and, as follows, with the local authorities. These issues constitute further aspects of the presence of the lace in the region.

The analysis of the contemporary functioning of the lace, in addition to the previously discussed aspects, also includes its influence on the local community and the community of the stakeholders. Both groups constitute a part of the local community with strong familial, neighborly, economic or emotional relations. As I tried to show in my text, although the lace has been the bonding element between the inhabitants of Koniaków – and, more broadly, of the Istebna county – it was also a disintegrating element, a source of internal competition. The emergence of one strong center and the activity of the leader of the stakeholders have changed the line of these divisions. It seems that the strongly atomized community of the stakeholders has become integrated to a larger extent. There are 100 creators permanently cooperating with the Lace Centre; in addition to selling their work, they are actively engaged in conducting the projects described in the text. Furthermore, 200 additional lace makers bring their products to the Centre to be sold. This number keeps growing. Simultaneously, the media and commercial success serves to create tensions between the leader and the people who were earlier engaged in the distribution of lace products. This does not fill one with optimism.

Conclusion

There exists a strong tension between what we perceive as cultural heritage, tradition, and the way we actually consume it. On the one hand, there appears an imperative that refers us to ways of thinking about the past as stagnation, lack of change. On the other, we speak about the necessity of adjusting to new needs, and thus, opening oneself to change which pertains to material artifacts, the creative process and other activities concerning promotion, presence in the media, performative activities. Cultural heritage is durable to an extent it can be adjusted to changes through transformation (Holtorf 2018: 6). This means that the vitality of heritage is not influenced only by its institutional safeguard-

ing, but also by the attitude and activity of its stakeholders and the role they assign to the heritage: educational, economic, tourist or entertainment, ludic. It is significant to emphasize symbolic values within the heritage, which should be key to managing its resources. In the context of heritage understood as craft and handicraft practices, wherein the financial aspect appears, the attitudes of the creators (stakeholders, leaders), consumers and the people responsible for participating in the process of its safeguarding, creation and transmission are equally important.

Cultural policies carried out by local authorities, which are a part of the strategy of regional/local development, are the main tool serving to delineate priorities in managing and utilizing the resources of intangible cultural heritage. The higher the level of “utilizing” these resources is, the more do the local authorities become aware of the role this heritage plays in the development of the local community, both in its economic dimension and in the development of social capital, including strengthening of cultural identity.

Working out a sustainable way of management of heritage resources is a necessary condition for the success of conducting efficient cultural policy, so that relations between these agendas and stakeholders would not be based on conflict that can result from differing goals and expectations with regard to the existing resources of intangible heritage. This is why the most important issue here is cooperation based on strong, multilateral relations of the engaged groups and communities, including local authorities, who are the closest to local communities. Indeed, such cooperation between a diversified environment and a given group of stakeholders may minimize the phenomenon of pressure exerted on the undertaken activities that can emerge as a threat on the part of the dispatcher of financial resources carrying out cultural policies. This is not an easy task, given that the sector of this activity is constituted in social relations. Not infrequently are the representatives of local authorities themselves a side engaged to a larger extent than that defined by their position of power: they frequently are a part of the community of stakeholders. The contact between the heritage resources and its stakeholders is direct in nature, and connections with the legacy of the generations are based on strong, emotional relationships. Accordingly, this means that heritage in action can be equally a bonding element and a threat against the sense of continuity of communities.

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