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## Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage – The Krakow Bobbin Lace

### ABSTRACT

In the first part of this paper the definition of the protection of intangible cultural heritage is introduced, based on the 2003 UNESCO Convention as well as the Polish legislation concerning the protection of items on the national list of intangible culture. The second part shortly characterizes the Krakow bobbin lace tradition along with its guardians, both present and past. In the third part it is systematically described what is being done to protect the tradition and craft in the Podgórze Culture Center thanks to the initiatives undertaken by certain guardians, and in the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow.

**KEYWORDS:** intangible cultural heritage, protection of cultural heritage, bobbin lace, local initiatives, Kraków bobbin lace

### STRESZCZENIE

Ochrona niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego na przykładzie krakowskiej koronki klockowej

W pierwszej części artykułu przytaczam definicję ochrony niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego na podstawie Konwencji UNESCO z 2003 r. oraz obowiązujących w kraju wytycznych dotyczących ochrony elementów wpisanych na *Krajową listę niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego*. W drugiej części pokrótce charakteryzuję tradycję krakowskiej koronki klockowej wraz z osobami jej głównych depozytariuszy, zarówno w odniesieniu do historii, jak i chwili oraz praktyki obecnej. W trzeciej części omawiam systematycznie kolejne typy działań, które podejmuje się na rzecz ochrony tradycji i rzemiosła: zarówno w Domu Kultury Podgórze, dzięki inicjatywom lokalnym podejmowanym przez niektóre depozytariuszki, jak i w Muzeum Historycznym Krakowa (od 1.03.2020 Muzeum Krakowa).

**SŁOWA KLUCZE:** niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe, ochrona dziedzictwa kulturowego, koronka klockowa, inicjatywy lokalne, krakowska koronka klockowa

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The main aim of this article is to present measures to protect and preserve the Kraków bobbin lace, inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO in 2016. These are various initiatives undertaken by the custodians of the tradition themselves, associated, among others, in the Association of Lacemakers of the Krakow Area, activities continued by the participants of the *Czar nici* Workshops of Artistic Handicraft, as well as events organized and animated by selected institutions, including, above all, the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow. I have analyzed these initiatives with reference to the *UNESCO Convention* of 2003, which is an official document and at the same time a kind of indicator of conduct in relation to intangible cultural heritage traditions. Due to the fact that in the Republic of Poland there are guidelines in force concerning applications for inclusion in the *National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage* established on the basis of the relevant *UNESCO Convention*, I first define tradition with the designation of those elements which constitute the definition of cultural heritage and its protection, taking into account in particular the Kraków bobbin lace.

The second part of the article is the most important one. It is a description of the measures taken to protect and preserve the Kraków bobbin lace with respect to the above-described definition. Finally, in the third part it is systematically described what is being done to protect the tradition and craft in the Podgórze Culture Center thanks to the initiatives undertaken by certain guardians, and in the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow.

Poland signed the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* as the 135th country in the world in August 2011, although the document itself was created several years earlier, in 2003 (*Convention* 2011). However, it should be noted that the ratification only consolidated certain activities that already existed in the system of cultural heritage protection in Poland. Nevertheless, neither before nor after the signing of the *Convention* has there been any relevant law that would regulate the protection of intangible cultural heritage and be dedicated to it specifically (Zalasińska, 2017). This situation has a negative impact on the sustainability of some of the activities as well as hampers the initiatives undertaken for this purpose. In order to sustain certain intangible cultural heritage practices, the institutions involved in sustaining them, in cooperation with the UNESCO committee, make certain commitments. However, most of them are limited in time and have a more ad hoc character, such as the agreement signed between the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and UNESCO on Christmas crèche-making. The issue of undertaken activities and legal protection of the practices belonging to Poland's intangible heritage is discussed later in the article.

Regardless of the situation presented above, the legal protection of cultural heritage in Poland (tangible and intangible) should be considered

with reference to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997. Although, as I mentioned earlier, there are no laws in Poland regulating the protection of intangible cultural heritage, this issue is indirectly determined by the protection of monuments and the activity of cultural institutions, including museums that are of interest herein (Zalasińska, 2017, p. 320): the protection of intangible cultural heritage is an element of museum mission. The latter is defined in *The Law on Museums* of 1996 (Schreiber, 2014b).

As part of the obligations shaping the tasks of museums, *dissemination of culture* seems to be of interest. Dissemination of culture is a set of activities that allow active initiating and co-creating of social processes, and thus protecting heritage, especially in intangible forms. The more and more actively undertaken museum activities of this kind have allowed these institutions to take over some of the duties from other institutions: community centers, schools and hobby groups. The integrated nature of all the UNESCO conventions, including those concerning the protection of intangible cultural heritage, makes it possible to combine various initiatives and provide an integrated approach to safeguarding this heritage: this creates certain cultural spaces, such as cultural parks.

Effective protection of intangible cultural heritage and its provision is an enormous challenge, with the lack of central regulations being its possibly practical dimension. The second dimension is the theoretical treatment of the issue and taking responsibilities associated with it. This, in turn, requires an understanding of the specificity and individual character of each of the elements of intangible cultural heritage: here, in the greatest dimension, the subject of consideration is the human being, but the definition and interpretation of the duties of protection goes beyond cultural anthropology. The human being remains the central element of the expression and preservation of intangible cultural heritage, the preservation of which is limited by the sometimes narrow frames of humanity, such as physical limitedness or short memory. Therefore, the need and necessity to transfer intangible cultural heritage to others and beyond: to human groups and communities is constantly revived (Schreiber, 2014a).

In Poland, the main institution responsible for the protection of intangible cultural heritage is the National Heritage Institute, which cooperates with the Council for Non-material Cultural Heritage established by the Minister of Culture and Heritage (Niewęłowski, Poźniak-Niedzielska, & Przyborowska-Klimczak, 2015).

In order to distinguish selected phenomena in the field of intangible heritage and related cultural spaces, based on the heritage Convention, UNESCO has created a special list of elements, namely the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* of 2003. The procedure

for recognizing the phenomena (more often referred to as elements) and inscribing them on the UNESCO *Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* resembles an analogous procedure used for the inscription on the World Heritage List. Most of the governments operating under the Convention have given appropriate powers to national institutions. In Poland, it is the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Often, an entry on the so-called national list is identified with an entry on the UNESCO list, which is not in line with the system and is not true, but stems from intentions and actions that go beyond the local or even regional environment. In addition, an entry on the UNESCO World Heritage List must precede entry on the national list of intangible cultural heritage. In some cases, representatives of several countries endeavor to recognize given elements all over the world, not just in one place.

The Kraków bobbin lace is an element of intangible cultural heritage, which was inscribed on the list of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016. Most of the custodians of this tradition have attended *Czar nici* Artistic Handicraft workshops offered for many years by Jadwiga Węgorok (b. 1952). All the ladies are residents of the province of Malopolska: Krakow or the surrounding area. Since 2016, the lace makers have also formed the Association of the Krakow Lace Makers. They are focused on knowledge and skills related to the traditional craft.

The ladies continuing the tradition are few and far between: approx. 30. It is important for understanding the phenomenon of the bobbin lace that it is passed on from generation to generation.

The bobbin lace dates back to the seventeenth century. It was initiated primarily in Italy, developed especially in the Netherlands, and later in other countries: Flanders, France, Switzerland, Bohemia, Russia, Poland and other European countries. The traditions and naming for the laces are related to historical and political events, e.g. there is the Flemish lace.

The method of lace making involves the use of lace threads strung on special blocks, called bobbins, and interweaving them in groups of four. There can be any number of the bobbins. The lace is placed on a special pillow as it is being made: in Krakow, it has a shape of a roller, onto which the design is pinned. The basic stitches, which are used in this technique, are plain and hash. The method of bobbin lace making produces ornaments, on top of different kinds of nets and background filling into prepared earlier motifs.

The bobbin also came into the old Krakow and quickly gained popularity there. Many artifacts are known, and even a tradition connected with the lace-making in the convents of Carmelite nuns, the Poor Clares and the Norbertine nuns, but with the rise of the textile industry, especially since the introduction of machine-made laces, the art of hand

lace-making began to fade. Again, for historical reasons, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a renaissance of lace-making across the world, and especially in Krakow and Malopolska. Lace-making centers established at that time and still existing are Zakopane and Bobowa.

The person who played a special role in the cultivation of the bobbin lace in Krakow is Jadwiga Węgorzek, a member of the Association of Folk Artists (STL) and holder of an official folk artist title. The association was founded in 1968 in Lublin. Currently, it has more than two thousand members and seeks to cultivate the creative tradition of folk culture in all areas and types of art, folklore and folk literature. Jadwiga Węgorzek created her hallmark *Czar nici* Artistic Handicraft Workshops in Krakow which have been running since 1999. The workshops repeatedly moved from place to place, and are now held at the Podgórze Culture Center, where the ladies meet in two groups, i.e., two times a week morning and afternoon. The main domain of Jadwiga Węgorzek's activity are various techniques of embroidery and lace-making.

It should be noted, however, that the bobbin lace workshops continue classes previously conducted by two distinguished custodians of the bobbin lace in Krakow: Zofia Dunajczan (1904–1985) and Olga Szerauc (1908–2017). The first one taught this method before and after World War II, teaching classes in community centers and other institutions. After Zofia Dunajczan retired, her role and responsibilities were taken over by Olga Szerauc. To some extent, the latter was a student of the first. Jadwiga Węgorzek learned bobbin lace-making from Olga Szerauc, and her open workshops gave her the opportunity to run her own classes and continue the earlier tradition. In the early years, some of the activities conducted by J. Węgorzek were also attended by then already retired Olga Szerauc who was still sharing her knowledge, passion and above all, tireless energy (Węgorzek, 2017). The workshops were also attended some of the earlier students, including Zofia Dunajczan's.

Due to the nature of the activity, Jadwiga Węgorzek tried to make her work stand out from others. For this purpose, she adopted her own style of the bobbin lace, using two colors: gray and white.

Over the decades the classes and workshops changed a bit, which is a natural consequence and anthropological change. Olga Szerauc and Zofia Dunajczan made their living thanks to their craftsmanship that they had acquired before the war on courses organized in schools. This kind of training was organized much more often at that time. After the war both: first Zofia Dunajczan and then Olga Szerauc conducted classes in community centers. Jadwiga Węgorzek learned lace-making directly from Olga Szerauc and treated it not only as a form of leisure activity: as the first person in the region of Krakow she was admitted to the Association of Folk Artists (STL).

Some of the workshop participants also enjoy the title of *folk artist* which, although through intangible culture and heritage within the meaning of the UNESCO Convention, allows one to start a business and gain some stability: perhaps not financial, but social. The STL members include, for example, Małgorzata Grochola, who reconstructs and restores old patterns based on old doilies, and adapting old drawings provided by Zofia Dunajczan to new patterns. Other enthusiasts, for example, Beata Ochab-Chrzan, who has a regular teaching job in primary education, teaches bobbin lace-making in one of Krakow's primary schools, not belonging to the STL. Beata Jarema, also a *folk artist*, gives individual classes and workshops for seniors in one of the municipalities near Krakow.

It is important for the understanding the phenomenon of the Krakow bobbin lace that virtually none of the ladies who created the tradition of craftsmanship came from Krakow or even from the surrounding area. Zofia Dunajczan was born in Oświęcim. She studied in Krakow before WWII and took an apprenticeship here. Then, she obtained a professional diploma and started working as a vocational training teacher, first at the State Vocational School and the Clothing Industry Secondary. Both before the war and after 1945, she participated in and taught many lace-making courses. After 1945, she started working as a lace-making instructor in Krakow's Culture Center and Youth Cultural Center, which was continued by Olga Szerauc (Sznajder, 2018).

Zofia Dunajczan's lacework was characterized by expressionism both in the way it was performed and through the selection of materials. She often tried to use colorful threads, using not only linen material, but also woolen and metallic threads rare in those days. She designed some of the patterns herself, and then duplicated the activities among participants.

Olga Szerauc, who was not much younger than Zofia Dunajczan, was born a subject of the Russian empire and she spent the early years of her life spent in the Caucasus. During the 1920s, her family moved to Vilnius, where she also began studying and where she graduated from the School of Artistic Weaving, having learned many techniques, including the bobbin lace. She spent the next tragic years of her life in a gulag in Kazakhstan (Szerauc, 2010). It was not until after the war that she settled in Krakow and took up employment in various places. She also attended a course in the bobbin lace, which Zofia Dunajczan ran at the Krakow Culture Center. After the death of the latter, she took over her duties. She worked as an instructor until 2009, educating several generations of lace makers. At the end of her life she provided her students with a huge collection of patterns requesting them to preserve the tradition in Krakow (Węgorzek, 2017).

The work of Olga Szerauc is more modest, both in terms of the selection of means and material. Her works are predominantly monochromatic,

however, her technique is exceptional: her laces are very light and precise. Jadwiga Węgorek chose a conservative style of work: she does not invent nor draw new designs. She prefers working with two-shades, as mentioned above, using the same patterns (Sznajder, 2018, p. 169).

The last mentioned lace maker was followed by the majority of the today's artisans belonging to the Association of Lacemakers of the Krakow Area and attending the *Czar nici* workshops: their laces are conservative, most often two-colored, and linen threads predominate. Occasionally, some deviations occur, or, as in the case of Iwona Poproch, interpretations of the bobbin lace, in which the author shows natural phenomena and references to the world, the Earth, and even the supernatural (Stolarska, 2019).

The *Czar nici* workshops have been conducted by Jadwiga Węgorek for over twenty years. They are not a direct continuation of classes conducted by Zofia Dunajczan and Olga Szerauc. Some of the characteristics of this type of activity should be mentioned here and highlighted. Firstly, the idea and method of conducting the classes devoted to the handicraft creates room for only one person who can direct the activities and organize them, gathering participants around themselves in a cultural center. Therefore, certain independence of the lace makers, whether through the development of their own activities, or by a documented membership in the Association of Folk Artists, is associated with the creation another group and workshop. Not all the creators feel such a need: some give one-on-one lessons and occasionally organize workshops, while others simply exhibit and sell their work during occasional trade fairs held in Krakow and the surrounding area. The Krakow bobbin lace makers try to take into account the current needs and conditions, adjusting the method of transferring their skills, e.g., by updating the patterns (Połubok, 2017).

Undoubtedly, the museum is the body that should help maintain tradition. In the case of Krakow's traditions and the urban environment since the entry onto the national list of intangible cultural heritage, such an institution is the Museum of Krakow (former Historical Museum of the City of Krakow) (Hankus, 2018), which takes care of the lace-making craft and its custodians in Krakow. Since last year, the branch of the museum, the Dom pod Krzyżem (Intangible Cultural Heritage Interpretation Centre), holds lace-making workshops. So far, classes were sporadic, but attracted wide interest. The ladies also prepared an open workshop during the European Heritage Days, which in 2019 were devoted to the textile tradition, titled "Woven tradition. The tradition of weaving." In the same year, the Museum of the Lace Makers' Association received a grant of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Traditional and Folk Culture 2020), the implementation of the task, however, was halted due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

The activities undertaken by the Association are always conservative in nature, i.e., for the tradition of intangible cultural heritage direct contact and traditional communication are important. In changing circumstances, methods and the organization of workshops are changing to an extent, but the principle of working together and continuing the tradition of lace making in Krakow remains the most important element, as it were constitutive for the custodians (Połubok, 2018, p. 298). It is also worth mentioning that the lace-makers of Krakow are enthusiastic about exhibitions, and organize some on their own, therefore, the need to share the common heritage and interests constitutes an important part of their life. It is also the element that very often allows them to find a new identity and identify with the local environment: among the members of the Association, many settled in Krakow only as adults (e.g. Jadwiga Węgorok, Małgorzata Grochola, Beata Jarema, and a few others). For some, such as, Beata Jarema, who belongs to the STL and lives near Krakow, lace-making provides an opportunity to integrate and be present in the life of the local community. A bobbin lace maker gives classes every year in the village in which she lives since she got married there, and as a member of the STL she adopted the Krakow folk costume characteristic of the region. The classes conducted by Beata Jarema are designed for people of all ages, both older and young people. Some of the lace makers come from Silesia (Stanisława Kuczyńska). The least numerous are those who were born and raised in Krakow, and who have family roots there (like the author of this article). The Krakow bobbin lace and the preservation of this tradition has allowed many of these women consciously choose a new local identity and actively relate to it.

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