

## THE SAFEGUARDING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: A BEGINNING OF AN OPEN-ENDING STORY

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In this paper, presented at the Náměšť Colloquy in 2013, Lucie Uhlíková and I focused on how folklore has been incorporated into the cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> Reflections on what that heritage embraces and attendant discussions of terminology and related issues have gradually come into focus. An inspiring example from among the rising numbers of new studies undertaken both here and abroad is the 2015 paper by the Swedish researcher Mats Nilsson, published in the *Journal of Ethnology (Národopisná revue)*, which examines the difference between the cultural heritage and tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The essence of the social sciences is to research the social environment and its ties to past and present. Key is its strong developmental dynamic, and this is indisputably reflected in the cultural dimension, as well. Thus we have the opportunity to observe what protecting the cultural heritage brings. Objectively, it is a story which has been unfolding in the Czech environment for almost two hundred years, one whose intensity has fluctuated with the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the time and with the personal inclinations of its protagonists. This is visible in the history of science—in ethnology, musicology, history, and literary criticism—as it is in various local historical, philanthropic, organizational, and other documents that have

1. Cf. Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2013.

2. Cf. Nilsson, Mats. 2015. “Udržte tancování při životě. Několik osobních postřehů o tanci jako tradici a kulturním dědictví.” *Národopisná revue* 25: 291–296. The author perceives folk dance as cultural heritage in the sense that it has been recorded and presented to spectators in an unchanging manner. Tradition entails the dance “being continuously practised” at various occasions.

accompanied cultural development at the local, regional, national, and international levels.<sup>3</sup>

In Bohemia and Moravia, *the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition (Národopisná výstava československá)* of 1895 was a watershed event for interest in traditional folk culture, giving rise to a flowering of scholarly and amateur activities in the area. Even prior to the exhibition, a number of events took place that tried to maintain and present the legacy of traditional folk culture. Among them was the Anniversary Exhibition of 1891, which presented folk culture using the setting of the traditional Czech village house.<sup>4</sup> But not until the *Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition* did an event take place with significance on multiple horizons: it was a milestone in **the development of ethnology as a scientific field**, including the establishment of collections of tangible and intangible culture; a milestone in **the development of sonic folklorism**, i.e., the presentation of “live” art and the establishment of clubs and associations interpreting folklore or folk culture on the stage; and, finally, a milestone in **the protection and use of folk culture within national culture**. At that time, teachers, ethnographers, writers, composers, and other representatives of the intelligentsia had been aware—for several decades—that traditional folk culture and its values were dying. Many of these people had also taken part in maintaining traditional culture and values and strived to return them to their “original” environment.

Similar efforts may be found in a number of other European countries. The work of Cecil Sharp (1859–1924) on folk dancing in England, for instance, has been described at this forum several times and from several points of view. But national movements

3. Some such considerations are available in Pavlicová, Martina. 2011. “Lidová kultura volně k použití – zamyšlení nad její ochranou a využíváním” in *Od folkloru k world music: Cesty za vizí*, edited by Irena Příbylová and Lucie Uhlíková, 28–38. Náměšť nad Oslavou: Městské kulturní středisko.
4. Cf., e.g., Křížová, Alena – Pavlicová, Martina – Válka, Miroslav. 2015. *Lidové tradice jako součást kulturního dědictví*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita (pp. 100–102).

making use of folk culture in its various forms have sprung up across Europe since the 19th century. They include the ethnic and state development of Finland, which attained final form only in 1917. The country's emancipation process had unfolded during seven hundred years of domination by the Swedish and, starting in the 19th century, by the Russians. For the Finish, the *Kalevala* epic, a mythological story by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) put together on the basis of legends, tales, and songs, played a key role. Despite its artificial origin, it became the basis of the Finnish identity. The epic is still a force in Finnish culture to this day: February 28, 1849, the publication date of the final version of *Kalevala* (earlier versions known as the Proto *Kalevala* and the Old *Kalevala* had been published in 1833 and 1835 respectively), is even celebrated as a national holiday—*Kalevala Day*.<sup>5</sup> A more recent example is that of Hungary. In the 1930s, a movement arose aimed at promoting and popularizing folk dancing and singing among young people in towns and villages. The movement was called the Bouquet of Pearls, and its members sought witnesses who knew the traditions. They were not only collectors but guardians, a role in Hungary's cultural politics they took up once again after World War II had ended (Kürti 2001: 100–101).

International efforts to establish the intangible cultural heritage began almost three decades ago. (The tangible heritage was recognised to be worthy of protection much earlier—see the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*.) In 1989, at the UNESCO General Conference, a *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* was adopted. The impact of the document was felt in the Czech Republic, too. In 1995, the country hosted an international meeting of UNESCO experts from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe who evaluated the implementation of the Recommendation in the region. The meeting was held at

5. For *Kalevala*'s significance for the Finish culture, cf., e.g., Polák, Martin. 2011. *Geneze finského folklorismu*. Bachelor thesis. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

the National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice and formed the basis for further scholarly gatherings. The National Institute of Folk Culture subsequently issued a methodology guidebook for UNESCO: *Principles of Protection of Traditional Folk Culture from Inappropriate Commercialisation*. In 2002, a Czech variant of the UNESCO Living Human Treasures program, entitled *Bearer of the Tradition of Folk Crafts* was established.

In 1999, an *Action Plan for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was adopted in Washington, and in 2001, UNESCO published the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*.

In 2003, at the 32nd General Conference, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was adopted. The Convention demands UNESCO member states establish a Representative List recording the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. (The Czech Republic met this condition in 2009 by preparing the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the Czech Republic. Applications are received by the Ministry of Culture and are assessed by the National Council for Traditional Folk Culture. The List is administered by the National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice, which provides for re-documentation of the assets recorded).<sup>6</sup>

There are other cultural/political documents that concern the cultural heritage. One is the 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. Among other things, signatories pledge to respect the inviolability of the cultural heritage; to ensure that all technical standards take the specific needs of the cultural heritage into account; to promote and explore the present-day use of materials, techniques, and skills based on tradition.<sup>7</sup>

6. For more detailed history of the UNESCO declarations, see Blahůšek, Jan. 2010. "Slovácký verbuňk v Reprezentativním seznamu nemateriálního kulturního dědictví lidstva" in Blahůšek, Jan a kol.: *Slovácký verbuňk. Současný stav a perspektivy*. Strážnice: Národní ústav lidové kultury. 9–17.

7. "Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society." *Council of Europe* [online] [accessed July 15 2016]. Retrieved from: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680083746>>.

But of much greater interest to ethnographers than this list of official sounding, formal declarations—a list which is by no means exhaustive—is the subject itself. It cannot be completely disentangled from political and official viewpoints: the public administrative bodies responsible for compliance with international agreements must be taken into account, as must the individual local governments whose competencies include the specific cultural expressions that are subject to the conventions' protection. If all these contexts are not considered, there is a danger that protection of the cultural heritage will become a formal issue, one that will receive media coverage insofar as it touches on international obligations, but whose essential meaning may fall by the wayside.

Focusing on the “terrain”, the thing most interesting to us as ethnographers, several levels are discernible.

The first level is theoretical. As researchers, we explain the nature of a specific expression within the context of the cultural heritage according to the definition indicated in the UNESCO Convention. Potentially, we assess whether the expression is or is not covered under the protections. The next level consists in applied ethnology or anthropology. Here, experts may directly intervene in the tradition-forming process. This is nothing new. Such tendencies have been apparent from the time of the *Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition*. Well-informed enthusiasts have shaped the future course of folk culture expressions and thus contributed to the formation of the folk movement, and folklorism in general.

Then there is the protection of the cultural heritage in the international arena, where experts from individual countries come to battle in the UNESCO “free competition” to have their items entered into the world heritage lists. And the final level goes to the very heart of ethnology: research into and the study of cultural expressions and processes related to protection of cultural heritage. These explorations, however, are coloured by the transmission of the cultural values of a particular location and the role played by the bearers of culture.

As ethnologists, of course, we see an opportunity to study the expressions of traditional folk culture: ethnicity, national and local identity, global and transnational contexts (Reed 1998). Of the levels discussed above, it is clearly the first that provides a basis for investigating efforts to protect the cultural heritage, since it places individual expressions into their ethnic, regional, national, and self-determination contexts. Any global view simply confirms ethnic or some other identity in the contemporary world.

The main storyline is clear—traditional folk culture and the efforts made to maintain it, to revive and protect it—but the setting of the story changes, and so does the plot. Sometimes the focus is the traditional culture of an ex-colony, sometimes the culture of the colonizers. Sometimes it is the story of a country that has gained emancipation from a vast empire, or those countries that were under the sway of the former Soviet Union. Still other stories concern the cultures of ethnicities that have always lived as minorities within a greater whole or those that have been assimilated or exterminated and thus had no means left by which to establish self-determination.

If within the Czech environment the interest in folk culture in the 19th century was based upon a national movement—the 1891 Anniversary Exhibition was a direct expression of Czech national identity, since the German ethnicity refused to take part after a dispute between the Young Czech Party and the National Party—then the origin of a new state in 1918 reinforced the role played by identity in the folk culture of the Czech, or Czechoslovak, nation at the expense of ethnic minorities in Czechoslovakia. Cultural expressions and considerations in the second half of the 20th century were clearly influenced by the “Iron Curtain”. Within the Soviet Union, “folk art” had been declared the basis of all Soviet culture as early as the 1930s. The subsequent rise of “socialist realism” made folk art the preferred source of culture. Models of stage music and dance presentation came into being that were unified in character and influenced the cultural scene in Soviet satellite countries, as well (Herzog 2010:116). Significant Czech artists frequently took

part in the movement, and although they re-evaluated their stance over time, the 1950s nonetheless strongly impacted them. They included Alena Skálová (1926–2003), the choreographer, who worked on the film *“Zítř se bude tančit všude”* (1952) with the song-and-dance troupe “Soubor písní a tanců Josefa Vycpálka”. In 1953, in a book describing the selection of Czech and Moravian Wallachian dances featured in the film, she wrote: *“Folk dance has assumed a position of growing prominence on the professional stage. Today, it is very clear to us that folk dance, like folk art as a whole, must and will be the basis for the revival of all our dance art.”* (Skálová 1953: 5)

Many other factors placed Czech folk culture in an advantaged position during the socialist era. They included attempts to build on the national revival period accurately described by the literary theorist Vladimír Macura (1945–1999): *“Decoding the current situation using the revivalists’ code and the continued confrontation between the socialist presence and the revival served a double purpose. On the one hand, it had a regulatory and normative function: it placed requirements on the present that were construed from partial moments of the tradition. (Once again, it should be noted that this took place at the expense of a substantial general deformation of the tradition due to the interconnection of various time levels and the thoroughgoing suppression of anything that did not fit.) On the other, it fulfilled what might be labelled an adaptive function. The new world of socialism was presented as an authentic world of ‘Czech values’. The nation seemed to be disconnected from these values by bourgeois culture that severed the natural human roots that our ‘revivalists’ built on. According to this logic, the construction of new culture thus represented a return to the roots from which the Czech culture was born, and from which it was separated by foreign actions. Therefore, it was a return to the natural.”* (Macura 1992: 57) Macura notes other factors that worked towards the transference of the folk tradition, although they pushed it in a different direction. He presents an example,

using the folk dance presentations of the first Spartakiade in 1955. These presentations were based on dances that had been performed by Moravian “Sokol” groups prior to World War I. (See, e.g., the well-documented Sokol event *Moravian Year*, which took place in 1914<sup>8</sup>.) The Spartakiade performance, however, had a different goal: “*Dance groups from all parts of the country arrived there to represent Czechoslovakia as a whole and to jointly demonstrate joy as the permanent ‘state of soul’ of the socialist people.*” (Macura 1992: 66)

The second half of the 20th century gradually brought further impetus for an interest in folk culture that did not stand on the dogmas of the post-war period. It had its greatest impact on care taken to preserve folk culture in the form of museum exhibitions and by establishing open-air museums, developing scenic folklorism for educational purposes, holding folk culture festivals, and so on. (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2008) The political changes of 1989 brought the protection of the intangible cultural heritage in the country practically into line with the UNESCO concepts outlined earlier.

Although our concern here is not with large-scale cultural systems but rather the practical knowledge of our “own” terrain—something that has undergone unprecedented change in its relationship to traditional folk culture—the words of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) are nevertheless apropos: in his essay *Race and History*, published by UNESCO in 1952, he says, “*The need to preserve the diversity of cultures in a world which is threatened by monotony and uniformity has surely not escaped our international institutions. They must also be aware that it is not enough to nurture local traditions and to save the past for a short period longer. It is diversity itself which must be saved, not the outward and visible form in which each period has clothed that diversity, and which can never be*

8. Cf. “O Moravském roku 1914. Rozhovor Dušana Holého s Vladimírem Ševčíkem a Martinou Pavlicovou.” *Národopisná revue* 3 (1993): 93–102.

*preserved beyond the period which gave it birth.*” (Lévi-Strauss 1999: 61) Claude Lévi-Strauss did not offer a specific solution, since one is in any event impossible. But despite the lack of an answer, from a philosophical standpoint, Lévi-Strauss’s observation may inspire the direction we take in considering our own folk culture and which expressions we wish to protect. This may be helpful, since no specific guidebook exists as to how these expressions are to develop nor what stages they are to pass through.

Key inscriptions of cultural expressions from Bohemia and Moravia, namely the Carnival processions and masks in the Hlinecko region and the Ride of the Kings, were recorded in the UNESCO *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* less than ten years ago. The only exception is the ‘Verbuňk’, a Slovácko region dance, which was entered in 2005. Even the methodological tools aimed at preserving the dance—particularly the contest of recruiters—became a sort of cultural artefact that underwent its own development. This situation is not unique. Both Czech and international inscriptions of cultural assets make it clear that some elements of the expressions on the list do still represent a transfer of the original tradition. However by means of festivals and public presentations—which not only popularize these traditions but also contribute to their transference—they take on entirely new features. Serbian researchers Dragana Radojičić and Miroslava Lukič Krstanović describe this as **tradition in process** (Radojičić – Lukič Krstanović 2015: 303). For inscriptions related to the calendar cycle—the Hlinecko Carnival and the Ride of the Kings—the fact that these events represent festive occasions for the local community is of key importance, although their presentation on other occasions exceeds the original boundaries of cultural expression, thereby giving rise to new cultural heritage paradigms.<sup>9</sup>

9. Cf., e.g., Stavělová, Daniela. 2013. “Vlčnovská jízda kráľů pohledem současného výzkumu (experimentu).” *Národopisná revue* 23: 3–13.

The UNESCO conditions, which must be met if expressions of the intangible cultural heritage are to be protected, speak clearly: the dominant motivation cannot be commercialization and tourism. Care must be taken to ensure their ethical aspect, to make certain that they are heartfelt expressions of the bearers who pass them from one generation to the next. Clearly, there is no firm basis in quantification; it is the spirit of the law rather than the letter of it which is to be observed. But this means the “spirit of the law” must be supported to be comprehensible for all stakeholders: not only ethnographers and other experts who may have a deeper understanding of theoretical issues, but particularly the tradition bearers and stakeholders in the field. The *Convention* text says nothing about the expression being maintained in the form in which it was inscribed. Moreover, the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss suggest that this is not even possible given cultural development. But what should future inscribed and protected expressions look like? For a general idea, we return to Lévi-Strauss: *“Tolerance is not a contemplative attitude, dispensing indulgence to what has been or what is still in being. It is a dynamic attitude, consisting in the anticipation, understanding and promotion of what is struggling into being. We can see the diversity of human cultures behind us, around us, and before us. The only demand that we can justly make (entailing corresponding duties for every individual) is that all the forms this diversity may take may be so many contributions to the fullness of all the others.”* (Lévi-Strauss 1999: 61)

The story of cultural heritage protection does not end here.<sup>10</sup> But we must be aware of it so that we do not become trapped within our own point of view, using it as the only possible input. And we must call attention to the core truth that culture must be maintained, developed, and protected. This is not only so, of course, for folk culture, the key subject of our expertise.

10. Lucie Uhlíková and I stated this similarly in the case of folk culture, albeit in a slightly different context. See Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2013.

One final note in conclusion. The protection of folk culture takes place within the cultural/political realm and is thus frequently shepherded solely by the state or by the administrative system. In 1946, the leading sociologist Inocenc Arnošt Bláha published the essay *Culture and Politics*. Although it illustrates the post-war notion of social equality, something many intellectuals (wrongly) attributed to the Soviet political system, his consideration of the relationship between culture and politics is inspiring. Bláha expressed the relationship between culture and politics in five points: culture over politics, culture under politics, culture alongside politics, politics in culture and culture in politics (Bláha 1946: 9). It is the last of these relationships he considered the ideal “*which can come under discussion only once culture includes elements of science (logic), aesthetics [...] as well as philosophical and ethical elements.*” (Bláha 1946: 27) This certainly holds true not only for politics but the cultural/political sphere that creates a crucial framework for protecting the cultural heritage. Anyone concerned with the folk tradition should keep this ethos in mind. The development of the folk culture story, interest in it, and its protection always lie with those who take part in the process.

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## Summary

The essence of social sciences is the research of social setting and its links to the past and present. One of the issues which is discussed within this context in a cultural setting is the protection or safeguarding of cultural heritage. In the Czech lands, this issue has been discussed for almost two centuries, with bigger or smaller intensity, and was always connected with the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the society around it. This can be proved by the history of science, be it ethnology (ethnography), musicology, history, or literary science, as well as various proofs in national history and geography, philanthropy, organizations, and more, which follow the development of culture within local, regional, national, and multinational levels. The first efforts, which led to an introduction of the concept of intangible cultural heritage, appeared three decades ago; they were represented especially by UNESCO. They climaxed in 2003, when the General Conference of UNESCO accepted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. To avoid it being a mere formality, it is necessary to include a broader perspective, especially a professional approach to ethnology. It includes the study of history (such as the Ethnographic Czechoslovak Exhibition in Prague in 1895, which opened a further interest in traditional folk culture in Bohemia and Moravia, and which was followed by numerous professional as well as non-professional activities in the field). Apart from the study of history, there is the study of processes and manifestations in which traditional folk culture has had an important role (such as ethnicity, national and local identity). The conditions of the UNESCO Convention, which must be fulfilled in the safeguarding of the cultural manifestations of intangible heritage, are clear: possible commercialization and tourism cannot be tolerated, and the ethical aspect must be observed; it is essential that a manifestation (of tradition) is linked with its bearers, who pass it from generation to generation. The final interpretation of the convention depends on professionals: they must make it understandable to all involved, both the scholars and the bearers of the tradition in the country, and they must follow its ethical dimension.

**Key words:** UNESCO; Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage; history; traditional folk culture; Bohemia; Moravia.