



Our Cultural Heritage in the Carpathians Stakeholders Conference - 5th March 2008 Cultural Centre of Harghita County, Miercurea Ciuc – Csíkszereda

Main Problems and Possible Solutions

A) Our Intangible Heritage

In the course of the discussion about our intangible heritage, every participant tried to interpret the topic based on their own experience, and then highlight the important specifics. Interpreting the concept constituted one of the essential questions, since the topic of intellectual heritage can have different interpretations for different groups. The participants also raised aspects of the minority (Hungarian) cultural intellectual heritage and also aspects of the values and lifestyle characteristics of the traditional agrarian society.

Our primary goals included the aim to make the results of our discussion, carried out within the intellectual, professional and civil spheres *as widespread as possible*. Only after getting to know our own cultural heritage can we hope to protect it efficiently and sustain it responsibly. Every participant considered similar problem-raising open discussions extremely important, but we could not remain at this level. So steps serving the 'small-scale' protection have to be taken primarily on *local level*.

Similar aims require the *responsible attitude of local governments, active NGOs, devoted teachers, a well-informed and professionally prepared expert team*. A suggestion was made to train a *team of experts* (e.g. in applied ethnography) who would help the work of the administrative units, within the micro-regions and regions, which would draw attention to the current threats.

These teams could be either be regional development managers or project co-ordinators, but their responsibilities would also include the supervision of the cultural (tangible and intangible) heritage, awareness raising concerning local values, exploring the possibilities of cultural tourism, marketing traditional handicraft products and every measure that could make the traditional culture rooted in their past more 'attractive' and 'interesting' to the younger generations.

Certainly, besides human resources the *supporting resources* are also important. In this field opinions differed since the insufficient exploitation of available funds, their abuse on the part of the administrative elite and the inexpert use of funds committed to the political clients, identified by NGOs, all represented problems.

In Harghita county the Szekler community, which constitutes the easternmost population of the Carpathian Basin, has, due to their history followed a peculiar course of development. Several geo-political factors has led to the formation of a very specific lifestyle, elements of which can be found even nowadays. Such Szekler characteristics are known by the wider public today. All these *attitudes, behavioral patterns and forms of community demeanor* are strongly connected to a **lifestyle close to nature**, a self-sustaining economy and a privileged social status.

These virtues, are difficult to interpret to an outsider, without knowledge of the Szekler history. So to introduce such aspects can only be done through interpersonal relationships and individual experience. Therefore the Szekler lifestyle, which is highlighted as one of region's greatest cultural values is also one of the most intangible.

Closely related to the *lifestyle* can we can also mention the knowledge through which small communities successfully co-ordinate both their administration and inter-personal relationships at local level. An important factor of these activities is constituted by the written *village laws* as well as *folk customs* rooted in personal habits. Thus

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the traditional **community knowledge**, regulating social hierarchy is a reminder of our former village communities, which is not widely shown today but which constitutes the starting point of intellectual heritage.

In this field we can mention a good example of a traditional institutional form, successfully adapted to the 20th Century conditions. Several versions of the former village **kaláka** ('voluntary co-operative work') live on even nowadays, and renovation of many dozens of community buildings is accomplished through this practice. Using a western volunteer labour force in this way can be regarded as an aspect of revitalising small rural communities.

Through paying attention to the folklore customs, which have variations not only shown in appearance, we can also understand the *functional principles of old rural societies* more easily. That is, we can gain an insight into newer segments of community knowledge and awareness.

Folk religiousness is closely connected with the rural lifestyle, the rich **body of beliefs** of individuals, and last but not least the ritualised **traditional medicine** and **knowledge of plants**. And this constitutes an indispensable part of our intangible heritage. Great attention should be paid to village **customs**, and such actions which formerly had widespread community support can only be found to a very small extent today, and their underlying content has long been forgotten.

The importance of **folk dance**, **folk music** and other **folk genres** was discussed separately. Education through music and dance is not only the promoter of our dance culture but, as was underlined by most statements, *dance houses* and *dance groups* have a cohesive force for the community as well. Certainly, an increasingly important task has to be undertaken by voluntarily organised amateur dance groups in rural communities, since through them young people receptive to modern genres have the opportunity to get to know traditions as well.

This does not exclude the dance houses enjoying great popularity in urban communities either, since, judging by the high attendance, the main interest is in the folk dances. The relatively widespread knowledge of folk songs also seems encouraging, but other folk genres (folk tales, ballads, legends etc) fall into the background. The narrowing of the linguistic segment, together with the gradual 'decline' of the feeling of connected locality also appears to be increasingly important.

The sayings, dialectal words and idioms illustrating formerly the peculiar way of thinking and knowledge of small communities are now only found in the older generation, as the younger generation does not perceive their meaning. Thus, language education also offers an opportunity to preserve a well-defined segment of traditional knowledge.

In the course of our discussion we devoted special attention to the debate of technical knowledge. By this collective term we mean the knowledge possessed by traditional craftsmen and cultivators of small trades. The work creating objects is one of the spectacular parts of our heritage, therefore it is our essential task to give preference to authentic products, traditionally made and consider how they are marketed.

Here we can also speak about fortunate efforts, such as the promotion of trademarks for good quality local, traditional products. Based on our knowledge we outline here some crafts whose cultivation could be encouraged and which would hopefully stimulate the neighbouring masters and communities as well :

- *Nyikómente*: basket weaving, fruit-growing/processing
- *Sóvidék*: salt mining, tile-making, ceramics and tinderwork, woolen blanket-weaving, charcoal-burning; carnival customs – burial; farewell party given by young men joining the army
- *Homoródok vidéke (Homorod)*: furniture painting, lime-burning, wood processing, peasant baths and use of mineral water
- *Keresztúr vidéke (Cristur)*: sieve-making, timbora-making, straw-plaiting
- *Hegyalja*: tile-making, wood processing, gate-carving, distilling of plum brandy, pie-baking, home-made bread
- *Kászonok (Plăieșii)*: mineral water-bottling; "bull-hitting"- carnival customs, soldiers' songs

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- *Menaság*: "csepezs" –making "Jewish vespers" – carnival customs
- *Felcsík*: wool processing, pottery (black ceramics), dyed wool-weaving, knowledge of herbs; carnival customs, dance groups, guarding holy graves, "angeling", harvest balls
- *Gyimesek (Ghimeş)*: gardon-making (gardon is a musical instrument), tannery – fur coat –sewing; sheep-farming lifestyle, dance, music
- *Gyergyó vidéke (Gheorgheni)*: sylviculture, plant textile dyeing; carnival customs - burial, border-watching, water-rite

This list is meant to merely indicate and illustrate a few peculiarities of trades and customs. The ethnographic regions of Odorhei, Ciuc and Gheorgheni abound in similar traditional elements. Greater attention should be paid to ethnographic collections, surveys and analyses. These exist, though they mainly focus on smaller regions, settlements. Producing a monography synthesis, by different experts is recommended.

Throughout our discussion we considered the opportunities offered by tourism for revitalising settlements. However, we felt it to be important that this should be developed moderately, and with expertise, since in displaying our cultural heritage, marketing cannot be the decisive factor. A balance should be found in the producer-mediator-recipient relationship, in such a way that everything we offer to the visitor should be a faithful mark of our traditional culture.

In this spirit, throughout our discussion we tried to keep in mind the interests of the individuals of local communities and the possible expectations of visitors interested in our culture.

Zoltán Miklós
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B) Our Built and Material Heritage

In the course of our discussion we tried to take into account the elements which fall into the category of built and material heritage which define the part of the Carpathians in Harghita county. Our discussions reflected the time we had at our disposal and also the number and the division of the participants. It is obvious that the picture could be made more complete with the participation of more architects, micro-region managers, museologists, experts working at regional governments (mayors, town planners and architects) dealing with the built heritage, landscape architects, ethnographers and experts working at local government offices.

It was also apparent that cultural heritage and its protection should only be considered within a comprehensive and synthesizing viewpoint. That is landscape, environment, the settlement network, village and street aspects, peasant houses, traditional trades and their products, monuments and archeological sites are equally important. They lose a significant part of their meaning if they are regarded separately, torn from their context.

We discussed in detail, more or less thematically, the current important heritage protection issues.

Cultural landscape

The greatest heritage of the Carpathians is the landscape. It represents a heritage to be protected not only according to the local level but also according to EU regulations. The forests, the old pattern of strip-farming, the localization and village pattern and traditional agriculture practices are all increasingly endangered. The threats include the uncontrolled use of forests, consolidation of land-strips, chaotic village expansion, the transforming economy and the location of industrial projects.

Obviously, the protection of the cultural landscape cannot mean solely the conservation of the present state, thus hindering development. There are some forms of farming and trade that conform more to the traditional arrangements (small co-operatives, cluster-systems and home industry etc). These can sustain the cultural landscape (for example through animal husbandry and strip-plot agriculture) and preserve village structures and other landscape elements.

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At the same time, sustaining the landscape has consequences that cannot be directly measured in profit, such as a healthier environment, feelings of “home”, natural leisure activities and community cohesion (trips, mushroom collecting, home-cooking). Also rural tourism can make a better use of the natural environment. The landscape is a resource, a common environment for the local people, who do not always recognize its value for others. Therefore raising awareness concerning its value, by showing alternatives and offering concrete examples that demonstrate the economic benefits are important.

Village, Plot and Houses

Also undergoing disintegration are the traditional narrow, plot-farming system, the associated pattern of farm buildings (house, barn, auxiliary buildings and garden) and the village structure and localization. Also due to unplanned village development, village borders are now encroaching into formerly inhabited areas in many places. This is shown by linear development along roads, not suited to the place and traditions, replacing the traditionally scattered, set-like Carpathian village aspect.

Such development also tends to vary from the particular, native style towards a characterless foreign type. The old pattern is regarded as a symbol of poverty, something to be ashamed of, and the current goal is for a new unique, prominent house or building.

The current regulations concerning country planning and fire protection (requiring a minimum 14m wide plot, using reduced or no wood in construction) also prescribe highly different solutions from those of the traditional village aspect. These have to be adapted to local conditions.

One of the most important things to be done therefore is providing information and education for the local community to help them recognize and appreciate the wider value of their traditional architecture. To achieve this goal, alternatives and positive examples should be provided, as opposed to the current ‘pink-box’ houses. In such ways we can encourage planning and houses which satisfy present needs but also fit into the village aspect, and traditions. Such planning and construction could be supported, (e.g. through development assistance and tax allowances) and could be widely promoted.

A further possibility and task is to revise the country planning (PUG, PUZ) from the point of view of the traditional village aspect. This should involve an advisory council of architects, in the individual regions, to assure efficiency (so that good ideas do not fail due to untrained staff and undue influence upon bureaucrats).

Heritage protection should also be included into regional development training, decision-making and the division of funds as well.

Cross-sectoral consultation and co-operation efforts are needed, in the case of regional development strategies and country planning, and conditions for this should be created. Local history, knowledge of the place (nature conservation areas, built heritage and traditions) should be urgently introduced into education.

Traditional trades

Folk craftsmen, their knowledge and products are almost completely repressed by at present. As a result of changes in lifestyle and the economic environment, the number of master potters, weavers, carpenters and blacksmiths etc has decreased, or they only produce for the market demanding cheap kitsch. There is a need for a well-thought strategy so that knowledge and products should not be forgotten completely. Expert training has to be supported in this field and support must also be given to the still functioning workshops and masters. The craftspeople should be helped to fit organically into rural tourism activities so that high standard, authentic products can also find a market.

Monument Protection and Archeological Heritage

The churches are indispensable elements of the Harghitan landscape. The castles, manor houses and sites are also important elements of local identity and history. Despite this fact, people are not aware of their importance. Moreover, not even decision-makers realise that the built and archeological heritage is a ‘resource’ which will not

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renew itself. Although the protection of the built heritage (churches, folk architectural monuments, manor houses, streetscape etc.) and archeological heritage is guaranteed law, it is endangered in many respects.

The archeological sites next to settlements are especially threatened due to present constructions and infrastructure developments (canalization) connected to investments now underway. At the same time, due to the tensions preceding 1989, communities are afraid of archeology, and they do not consider monument protection offices and archeological offices as their partners. Interventions are not planned and carried out by experts and often they are not even permitted by the communities. In such ways, important heritage elements are destroyed in the course of benevolent 'renovation'.

This hostility is also reinforced by the current archeological law that charges the owner of protected items with the full expense of their protection. This is independent from whether the site is situated on a family plot or on the outskirts of settlement, in which, for example a multi-national company may be interested. In addition, despite the current laws, required research, protection and sanctions await the owners protected items.

The attitude of the locals is also influenced by ignorance, since local history education, through which children and adults could learn that their church and school represent valuable heritage, or that a pre 10th Century archeological site is part of the local cultural heritage, is almost missing. This situation could be improved with campaigns and with readable village booklets.

The activities of local museums is also lacking in this respect, as very few experts have a sufficiently well-trained background and they struggle with complete lack of resources (there has not been any money for archeological research in the budget of Harghita County museums of for several years). The current staff and wage-system, continuing the 'appointed persons policy' of the 1980s, in spite of the significant income from archeology sites, not only makes it difficult to involve students in exploration and employ new colleagues, but it also erodes the morale of the active working archeologists. The number of experts has to be increased as there are very few architects and archeologists dealing with monuments, and they have to be paid because well-managed explorations, related to larger investments elsewhere also take away local experts.

Further challenges include the valid country planning projects that must be completed, as soon as possible, with a list of monuments and archeological sites, so that these can be taken into consideration, in the case of different planning activities. Related to this, the study monuments and archeological effects should be naturalized. The owners of monuments and citizens owning 'inherited' sites should be supported, so that their expenses can be partly supported by the relevant authorities (local government, office and ministry).

It is proposed that the source for this could be a heritage protection tax, related to construction permits, following the French pattern.

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